



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Princeton University Library



32101 063846545

Cme A.A. 5

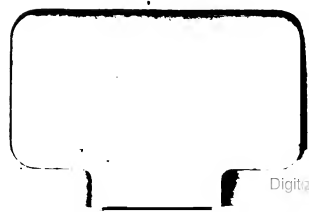
~~ANNEX LIB.~~

51

Library of



Princeton University.



Ann. A. Carroll
92 George St

SERMONS

• UPON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN

OF

SAINT ALPHONSUS M. LIGUORI,

BISHOP OF SANT' AGATA DE' GOTI, AND FOUNDER OF THE CON-
GREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER.

ACCOMPANIED BY

A NEW LIFE OF THE SAINT, COMPILED FROM THE
MOST AUTHENTIC MATERIALS.



DUBLIN :

PRINTED BY RICHARD GRACE, CATHOLIC BOOKSELLER,
45, CAPEL STREET.

M,DCCC,XLV.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.



CONTENTS.

PREFACE,	Page
LIFE OF SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI,	v
	xv

SERMON THE FIRST.

<i>The Lord appears angry, not that he means to punish us, but in order that we may cleanse ourselves of our sins, and thus enable him to pardon us,</i>	1
--	---

SERMON THE SECOND.

<i>Sinners will not profit by the divine threats, until the chastisement has come upon them,</i>	14
--	----

SERMON THE THIRD.

<i>God is merciful for a season, and then chastises,</i>	27
--	----

SERMON THE FOURTH.

<i>Upon the four principal Gates of Hell,</i>	41
---	----

SERMON THE FIFTH.

<i>External Devotions are of little use if we do not cleanse our souls from sin,</i>	59
--	----

SERMON THE SIXTH.

<i>God chastises us in this life for our good, not for our destruction,</i>	72
---	----

SERMON THE SEVENTH.

<i>God chastises us in this life, only that he may show us mercy in the next,</i>	84
---	----

4-24-37
(RECAP)
5957
586

SERMON THE EIGHTH.		Page
<i>Prayers appease God, and avert from us the chastisement we deserve, provided we purpose to amend,</i>	.	100
SERMON THE NINTH.		
<i>Most Holy Mary is the Mediatrix of Sinners,</i>	.	111
SERMON THE TENTH.		
<i>For the Feast of St. Joseph,</i>	.	123
SERMON THE ELEVENTH.		
<i>For the Feast of the Annunciation,</i>	.	139
SERMON THE TWELFTH.		
<i>Upon the Sorrows of Mary,</i>	.	152
FAMILIAR DISCOURSE AT THE RECEPTION OF A		
NUN,	.	164
DISCOURSE TO THE BRETHREN OF A CONFRA-		
TERNITY,	.	174
DISCOURSE TO PIOUS MAIDENS,	.	181

P R E F A C E.

THE volume which is now presented to the devout public, although destined by St. Liguori for the especial use of those engaged in the ministry of the Divine Word, possesses this advantage, in common with many works of a similar description by the same blessed Author, that it may be read with great spiritual advantage by Christian people indiscriminately. The pastor of souls it furnishes (to use a somewhat homely illustration) with a frame whereon to weave his sermons—a frame constructed with consummate skill out of materials supplied by Holy Writ, and the Fathers of the Church. The simple faithful it supplies with the greatest possible amount of instruction, in the smallest compass—possessing them of every truth connected with the subject, and every proof of each; yet so as to leave room for their expansion under the action of the reader's understanding—a plan recommended by the high sanction of St. Igna-

tius. "It is sufficient," says St. Ignatius, "briefly to trace the points of meditation, accompanying them with some few explanatory words, so as to leave room for the exercitant to reason after his own fashion upon the truths subjected to his consideration. Should he thus be led to anything enlightening him upon the subject, whether guided by reason or inspiration, he will feel more relish for it, and turn it to better account than if the subject had been explained to him in all its details." Now, although St. Ignatius in this passage speaks solely with reference to meditation, his remarks, I think, may apply to sermons in the hands of the laity; for, after all, religious reading is a kind of meditation—imperceptible, perhaps—but still meditation.

There are many things in the Sermons of St. Liguori to distinguish them from the French Sermons, which occupy a place so deservedly high in the libraries of pastors. Unlike the Sermons of Massillon, Bourdaloue, Bossuet, Fénelon, and M'Carthy, they are wholly destitute of that human and courtly eloquence, which I am far from insinuating that those great men did not wield with the utmost advantage to souls, and honour to the Almighty, but which, on the whole, appears to me a less fitting model for the eloquence of the Irish Clergy, taken as a body, than the simple and apostolic phrase of

Liguori. Although with those great and holy preachers, (confessedly the greatest whom any church can boast) St. Liguori never-endingly draws upon that exhaustless treasury of Divine Wisdom, the sacred Scriptures ; yet we fail to discover in the use he makes of the inspired writers, that ingenuity which amongst the French preachers often appears to run down the text, and force upon it constructions better calculated to amuse the fancy than to convince the reason. This use of the sacred text, although I am glad it has not the sanction of our Saint, and although Dr. Blair expressly disapproves of it, and although I cannot say that in this particular my taste is at variance with his, this use of the sacred text, I am far from condemning ; as it is a portion of that grand system of condescension by which the Church makes herself "all to all, that she may gain all to Christ," her spouse. Verily this Bread of Life which she breaks to the people may be said, like the manna in the wilderness, to possess the "sweetness of all tastes ;" so that whoso eats thereof will find in it the flavour that he loves. Christian eloquence may indeed be said to have a garb for every eye, and modulate her tones for every ear. During the first centuries of the Church, she arrays herself in the majestic and unadorned simplicity of the gospel ; during the decline of taste, she assumes

the tinsel of Rome, the stole of the Athenian rhetorician, the soft and gaudy chaplet of Asiatic Greece, and the Barbaric splendour of Asia itself, according as she must yield to the requirements of souls ; in the middle ages she does not disdain to play upon words, to balance an antithesis or point an epigram ; upon the revival of literature, she again conforms to the reigning taste, and makes the ancient classics tributary to the gospel ; and now in France she combats with its own weapons, the false philosophy of the age ; in England she adopts that quaintness and those old forms which the literature of the present day affects ; in Ireland she is impassioned, popular, and presses straightway to the heart ; and in the regions of the Far West, beyond the encroachments of civilization, the Jesuit, to whom the chaste and beautiful productions of Greece and Rome are familiar as household words, preaches the gospel in the exuberant, and to us, laughable metaphor of the savage tribes. In sooth, the gift of tongues has not departed from the Church, and announcing the same great truths to every generation and every people, she is understood by each in its own tongue, and the strain to which itself inclines.

There is another feature in the Sermons of our Saint, to which I would direct the attention of the pious reader. I allude to the simple, yet

striking, illustrations in which St. Liguori deals so largely ; and, as a specimen of which, I may be permitted to instance a sermon in which our blessed Author for the more forcible illustration of the value of redemption, supposes the case of a monarch who should suffer himself to be slain, that by immersion in a bath of his blood a worm (which could not otherwise be restored to life,) might be revived. Perhaps there is not an engine of sacred oratory which can be used with more powerful effect than this. The blessed Alphonsus Rodriguez, of the Society of Jesus, in his book on Christian Perfection, makes frequent use of it ; and Father Segneri, of the same society, in his admirable sermons employs it still more frequently than St. Liguori, simply because his sermons are longer and more numerous than those of the Saint. Who is there, unless he be devoid of faith, who can read without being startled the comparison used by Father Segneri to illustrate the relative severity of Purgatory pains and earthly fire ? "A soul," he says, "transferred from the fire of Purgatory to an earthly furnace, should feel as much relief as a man removed from such a furnace to a bath of gentle warmth." In another place, "the fire of Purgatory," he says, "acts not upon matter, but on spirit ; and we must bear in mind, that amongst beings capable of suffering, the most perfect

suffer most acutely. A sturdy clown ill clad, ill fed, ill housed, is proof against all the extremities of heat and cold ; whereas a delicate lady in her luxurious apartment is painfully alive to all the changes of the weather." There is no one to whom the beauty and the appropriateness of these illustrations will not be apparent, or who can fail to remark the new and somewhat startling light in which they place the subject. And now that the book of nature is so closely conned—now that the veil of mystery which for ages hung upon her secrets is fast falling off, that the obscurity in which she so long reposed, is every day invaded by some new light of science, and wonders are achieved, at the possibility of which our fathers should have smiled—now, in fine, that the conversation even of after-dinner parties turns upon those subjects, of what a magazine of beautiful and forceful illustrations may not the preacher possess himself if he will?—illustrations telling far more powerfully than any other species of argument upon those who understand them, a class which, although it is at present composed of persons chiefly from the higher walks, is being every day recruited from the National Schools, and far more useful as well as far more National Establishments of the Christian Brothers. I could multiply examples of these latter illustrations, but besides that it

might savour of pedantry, I must make amends to the reader for having omitted to solicit his indulgence for the two or three illustrations of another description which I have cited. Perhaps I view the scientific illustrations with an undue and distempered affection—perhaps they deserve less indulgence than I might feel disposed to challenge for them—perhaps they have all that they deserve in having mine; the reader may take them at what they are worth,—I think them valuable.

The next and last feature of the work to which I pray the attention of the reader, is the scriptural character of St. Liguori's sermons. There is not a single page in which you will not meet with several appeals to Holy Writ, not only falsifying the imputations of scriptural ignorance so unsparingly cast upon our clergy, but making it difficult, if not impossible, to find in any other author or preacher so much scriptural learning. Indeed, others have not been wanting practically to disprove this oft-repeated slander. The continual recurrence to the authority of Scripture to be met with in French sermons, from the courtly, but not on that account less apostolic eloquence of the *Petit Carême* to the simple, and on that account, almost more apostolic eloquence of the unpretending *prône*—the beautiful paraphrase of psalm, canticle, epistle, sermon on the Mount, or

other words of our Lord, with which Massillon and Mac Carthy beyond the others, so frequently conclude their sermons—the scriptural train of thought in fine, and turn of expression, which prevail throughout, proudly avouch that the ancient dispensatrix of the treasures of Scripture, still scatters them with undiminished liberality. And here we may observe in passing, that these scriptural allusions to be relished must be understood, and that they were understood we may fearlessly assume, from the bare circumstance of their having been used by the great men of whom we have been speaking. Hence, the mighty virtue of the word of Massillon, when in his sermon upon the last day, he summoned the “remnant of Israel” to “pass to the right,” and the multitude in its terror was fain to flee out of the Church.

The homily which is little else than a running commentary upon the text, is doubtless the most apostolic, if not at all times the most convenient form of sermon, so much so, that in point of fact, none other was made use of during the first ages of the Church, and St. Liguori’s sermons, though not of this description, are certainly as perfect a substitute as may be.

The sublime morality of the gospel announced by one who speaks as “having authority,” will ever find favour with the faithful people of Ireland ; but it is not possible that it should be

as efficacious, enforced by human eloquence, as by the words of inspiration. It irks me I confess, to hear a sermon of other than a scriptural character, for assuredly no beauty of language can compensate for the absence of that divine beauty which even a mere critic can discover in the Holy Scriptures. Profane writers esteem themselves fortunate to discover in some poet or other author, a suitable sentiment to back their own opinions. Is it not then a strange omission in a sacred orator, if he suffer any principle of morality to go unrecommended to his hearers by something from the Holy Ghost, who is ever ready to supply him with stronger and more eloquent arguments than his own sterile intellect can produce. So thought the amiable and great Archbishop Fenelon ; so thought St. Liguori.

I shall not pause to notice the frequent use made by St. Liguori of the holy Fathers, and pious anecdotes, for which latter authority however he challenges no more belief than the faithful can afford to give. For my own part, I shall resign all faith in history before I can be induced to disbelieve, such miracles as have been juridically proved in the process of a Saints' canonization. But I fear I have been betrayed into an essay, and have wandered from the descriptive which I set out with, into the didactic, which was not my province. It is too late for me now to ask the

reader in the words of the apostle to bear with me a little. He who shall have gone thus far must needs have borne with me,—I thank him for it—should any remark of mine meet his views, or contribute to his improvement he may consider me rewarded.

LIFE OF SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI.

A YOUTH of noble lineage who courageously bows him to the yoke of the Lord; a lawyer whose rare talents and vast acquirements as well as his extreme virtue, command the admiration of the entire bar of his country; a minister of the sanctuary, who renouncing the vain pomp of the world, and all the honourable posts to which he is entitled to aspire, takes the Lord for the portion of his inheritance; an indefatigable gospel labourer, who, burning with the love of God and his neighbour, spares no pains to promote the glory of the one, and the salvation of the other; the founder of a new congregation of missionary priests, who governs his order with unexampled wisdom; a zealous bishop who entirely forgetful of himself, thinks only of the flock committed to his care; finally, a venerable old man, who, laying down the burthen of the episcopacy, retires amongst his brethren, leads amid the sharp and protracted sufferings of disease, as well as the infirmities of old age, a hidden life, in Jesus Christ, and closes blessedly in the same his mortal career; all this we see in St. Alphonsus Liguori.

He was born in Marinella, in the suburbs of Naples, on the 27th of September, 1696, the feast of Saints Cosmas

and Damian, and baptised two days after, on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel. Amongst the names given him, Alphonsus, Maria, were the leading ones, and by these to the exclusion of the others, he is usually known. His father Joseph, of the noble house of Liguori, was alike distinguished for talent, (especially military,) and for virtue: and his mother Catherine, (also of a noble house,) was sister to the celebrated servant of God, Emilio Jacomo Cavalieri, Bishop of Troy in partibus, who died in the odour of sanctity. Indeed she was worthy such a brother, being scarcely, if at all, inferior to him in sanctity of life; whilst her virtues, more especially those which she exercised in the education of her children, were so numerous and striking, that they might well be chronicled distinctly from those of her blessed son.

Alphonsus, in early youth, nay, we might almost say, in infancy, had arrived at a degree of perfection which those might consider themselves happy, the labours of whose entire lives had been crowned by the attainment of. The odour of his sanctity, even then, edified all with whom he conversed; and those who have written his life in detail, mention numerous instances of virtue, more than one or two of which we cannot afford to specify, and these we must be content with barely naming. He had a remarkable disinclination for the amusements of children, and never took part in them, unless when charity, or the fear of singularity, ruled it otherwise. His perfect recollection, and tender devotion to mysteries, which most children of his age can scarce be brought to understand, were perfectly heroic, and even amongst the youths with whom he was obliged to associate in the college of nobles, under the conduct of the priests of the oratory, his conduct never varied; his devotion to the sacrament of the altar, and the Mother of God, continually gaining strength. His progress in human learning, kept pace so

well with his progress in the science of the saints, that when he had completed his legal studies, he required a dispensation of three years for admission to the degree of doctor in canon and civil law.

He practiced for some time at the bar, and was fast growing into repute, when an incident occurred, to which, in the dispensations of Providence, we are indebted for the apostolic labours, and inspired writings of our Saint. My meaning will not be mistaken when I say, that the writings of Liguori are inspired,—for, although we have no canonical assurance of the fact, yet surely we may believe that his writings, if not actually the dictation, were at least composed under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Alphonsus having been retained as counsel for the defence, in a case of great interest and importance, his pleading was so ingenious and so eloquent, that the president Signor Caravita, felt disposed to give judgment in favour of his client, when the counsel on the other side, instead of replying, simply begged of Alphonsus to reconsider his argument, and see whither it was not unsound. Alphonsus to his great confusion and surprise, perceived it to be flawed by reason of his having overlooked one negative particle in the process. The court and audience complimented him upon his able defence, and acquitted him of any blame upon the score of negligence; attributing his oversight to the warmth so natural to a young lawyer in his situation. Alphonsus, however, did not so readily acquit himself; but, having bowed to the court, was heard to say, as he withdrew, “false world, I know you, and have done with you;”—he had given up the bar.

Almighty God was pleased to enlighten his mind, during a retreat of three days, which he made under the direction of his confessor; at the end of which period he was confirmed in his resolution, to attend solely to the

b

care of his salvation. Even at this stage of his departure from the world, he experienced the opposition which he had so long to encounter from his father, but his determination was all the more steady for it, and he at once repaired to the hospitals of the city, where his vocation took a more specific form, and he heard himself invited by mysterious voices to the ecclesiastical state. It was now that his father began to be sturdy in his opposition : he engaged such of his relations as he thought likely to be influential with Alphonsus, to dissuade him from his project,—the congregation of St. Philip Neri, which Alphonsus sought to enter, was obliged to decline receiving him through fear of his father's resentment ; and when, at length, a tardy consent was extracted from him, it was only on condition that his son should remain for a year at home. Alphonsus having now nothing to divide his attention with the pursuit of virtue and sacred science, devoted himself unreservedly to the attainment of both,—and applied his powerful intellects so vigorously to the study of theology, as rapidly to fit himself for the office of a teacher in Israel. Instruction is peculiarly the duty of a christian priest ; the priest of idols offers sacrifice, but neither sacrifice nor the administration of the sacraments, are even the chief duty of a priest of the New Law, for St. Paul says, that he was sent to preach, rather than to baptize. The rapid and steady progress of Alphonsus in piety and learning, induced Cardinal Pignatelli, the then Archbishop of Naples, to hasten his promotion to tonsure and minor orders ; unwilling that the church should longer remain without numbering such a youth as he amongst her ministers. Immediately that Alphonsus was advanced to minor orders, he entered upon the discharge of his functions, and kept it with faith and assiduity. Anxious, not only to preserve that purity of life to which he was exhorted by the ordaining bishop, but,

moreover, continually to amass new treasures of grace, he regularly attended the religious exercises of the fathers of the mission ; a practice which he persevered in up to the time of his ordination to the priesthood. No sooner Alphonsus had received deaconship, than the Cardinal Archbishop, not content with permitting, exhorted him to preach ; and the obedient levite, in compliance with the desire of his pastor, preached his first sermon in the parish church of St. John, in Porta, upon the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. His zeal and unction soon brought upon themselves demands innumerable, and his labours were such, that he was seized with a fit of illness, which brought him to the verge of death. Having received the viaticum with that fervent piety which he always manifested towards the Blessed Sacrament, he expressed an anxious wish to have beside his bed the statue of the most holy Mary della Mercede, by whose altar he had hung his sword when about to leave the world. The clergy of the church complied with his request, although the night was far advanced ; and no sooner had he beheld and saluted the statue of his blessed mother, than all the mortal symptoms of his disorder vanished, and after a short time he was restored to health.

On the 27th of December, 1726, Alphonsus, being in the thirty-first year of his age, was ordained priest. We shall not dilate upon the raptures of Alphonsus, when he found himself on the summit of the holy mountain. We pass over the sentiments of faith, love, and gratitude, with which he immolated, for the first time, the sacred victim of the altar. We speak not of the redoubled fervour with which he applied himself to all his usual practices of piety, and more especially to the loving adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, we press onward to his apostolical labours, and taking a hasty survey of all he did, and taught, and weighing his title to greatness in the balance of the sanc-

tuary, over which is inscribed, "*qui fecerit et docuerit sic homines, hic magnus vocabitur in regno cœlorum.*" We shall see whether his title be such, that in the kingdom of Heaven he is called great.

As a matter of course, the pulpit labours of Alphonsus increased on his advancement to the priesthood; and to these were added the toilsome and revolting duties of the confessional. So great, in fact, was the esteem in which Alphonsus was held by his Archbishop, that he had no sooner been ordained priest, than he was appointed to conduct the retreat of the clergy, although there were amongst them many apostolic and eloquent men of older standing than he. He was peculiarly fitted for the confessional, not by the qualities which he possessed, (all of which are indispensable to every good confessor,) but by the degree in which he possessed them. His tenderness in receiving, his patience in hearing, his sweetness in admonition, were such as few or none had ever met with.—The unction with which he represented to the sinner his ingratitude, and the moving words by which he sought to excite him to repentance, were irresistible.

Inspired by his zeal for the salvation of souls, he be-
thought him of a means whereby to confirm his penitents in their holy resolutions, and instruct them more at large in the science of perfection. On festival days assembling them around him, in some remote and silent quarter of the city, he there addressed them on spiritual subjects. There encircled by persons of the meanest condition, he was all the better pleased on that account, as they afforded him an opportunity of enlightening them upon many portions of the christian doctrine, of which they had, till then, been ignorant. After a time several priests, and some laymen of a spiritual life, joined him in his conferences, when the assembly having been represented to the governor, as of a suspicious character, was dissolved,

though not without the innocence of its object having been recognised. The priests upon this, retired to a house in the city, and spent their time in exercises of penance and devotion, and those of no ordinary character, but, to Alphonsus scarce any extremity of vigour, scarce any pitch of fervour was unknown. Alphonsus took care that the dispersion of his hearers should not be prejudicial to the poor people who shared most of his attention, for he caused the more enlightened and zealous of his penitents, to assemble their less favoured brethren, and speak to them on spiritual subjects, with the consent of the Archbishop, in private houses, and hired rooms, and at length, even in public oratories and chapels.

Father Matteo Ripa, a truly apostolic priest, having returned from China, with some youths of that nation, destined for the sacred ministry, succeeded in 1729, in establishing a college for the Chinese mission. To this college Alphonsus withdrew, as well to escape the distractions of his father's house, as to perfect himself in the ministry of the divine word, under such a master as Matteo Ripa. Alphonsus lived in the college on no other footing than that of a guest, although for a time he had some thoughts of China, which he relinquished in obedience to his confessor, Father Pagano. Our Saint meanwhile continued to preach in all the churches of Naples to immense congregations, and with abundant fruit. At stated periods of the year, he conducted missions in various quarters of the kingdom, and while labouring for the sanctification of others, took such measures for his own, as are taken only by saints such as he.

Alphonsus, together with preaching in the Cathedral of Scala, during the novena of Jesus crucified, according to a promise given the bishop Monsignor Santoro, was also engaged in conducting the spiritual exercises, for the nuns of a certain convent, and hearing their confessions.

One of the sisters by name Maria Celeste Costarossa, a religious of holy life and many supernatural gifts, speaking one day in the confessional, upon spiritual matters, said to him: "Father Alphonsus, it is not the will of God that you should remain in Naples, he calls you to be the founder of a new congregation of Missionary Priests, for the spiritual aid of those souls who are most destitute." Alphonsus astonished and confused, endeavoured to convince her that this was delusion; but she would not be persuaded. In great trouble of mind, and not knowing whether he should treat the intimation he had received, as the offspring of an over heated imagination, (though he felt disposed to do so, by reason of its apparent impossibility,) he addressed himself to God in prayer, and took counsel of several learned and pious men, all of whom, including the Bishops of Castelmare de Sabia and Scala, assured him that the nun had conveyed to him the will of God, and the Bishop of Scala engaged him to establish the first house of the future Order in his diocess. This was enough for Alphonsus—he at once dismissed from his mind all trouble and anxiety, and leaving himself in the hands of God, immediately set about performing his holy will. No sooner did the news of his design get wind in Naples, than an almost universal outcry was raised against it. The Archbishop, the clergy, and laity were alike averse to it; but it was from the saint's father that it had to encounter the most vigorous opposition. Not content with arraying all his friends in hostility to the design of Alphonsus, he employed against it all the power of a father's tears, and that with such effect, that Alphonsus declared it to be the most formidable temptation he ever had to struggle with; having at length, however, won over the Archbishop, and propitiated even his father, he set off for Scala, and on the ninth of November, 1732, after having

celebrated a Mass of the Holy Ghost, and sung the "Te Deum," in thanksgiving for all the protection vouchsafed him in this matter, he laid the foundation of his new society. His first companions numbered twelve, consisting of ten priests, and two candidates for orders, together with a serving lay-brother, Vito Curzio by name, a rich gentleman of Acquaviva di Bari, who, admonished by a vision at Naples, had chosen that humble post amongst the brethren of the new congregation.

The life which Alphonsus and his companions led in Scala, resembled nothing so exactly as the life of those penitents whom St. John Chrysostom speaks of in his "Mystic Ladder." Their lodging was small and incommodious; their beds a little straw shaken on the floor; their bread black, hard, and coarse; their other food disgusting from its insipidity, and taken kneeling, their religious exercises never ending, what, with frequent disciplines, and continual watchings, are enough to make the most fervent tremble for their comparative tepidity; and here the question naturally suggests itself, when such were the austerities of all the brethren, how great must not have been the rigour of the holy founder? From time to time they dispersed themselves over the country to conduct the missions, and gathered in such harvests of souls (Alphonsus always foremost in labour and success,) as caused the bishop to thank God with all the fervour of his heart, for having provided his diocese with these apostles, and above all, with Alphonsus, who was the great instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and next to God best entitled to its gratitude.

Whilst Alphonsus and his brethren, labouring thus for their neighbour's salvation, and their own, seemed like the primitive christians to have one only heart, and one only soul, the enemy contrived to sow his tares amongst them, and scatter the infant congregation. Our Saint

thinking it high time to have a code of rules framed for the government of his congregation, wished to collect the views of his brethren upon the subject. Some would fain combine the care of poor schools with their missionary labours; some were advocates for more absolute, and some for mitigated poverty; some insisted upon increased austerity, and some advised relaxation; nearly all condemned the plan of Alphonsus. The Saint at other times so deferential to his brethren, defended his plan, and adhered to it in every particular, notwithstanding the opposition of his companions, who, at length deserted him, with the exception of Cæsar Sportelli, as yet a secular, and the lay-brother Vito Curzio.

As soon as it reached Naples that Alphonsus was abandoned by his brethren, those who had originally been hostile to his design, renewed their condemnation of it in no very temperate strain. They taxed the saint with presumption, and held him up to ridicule, not allowing, even the Archbishop, to escape uncensured for the favour which he shewed Alphonsus; but the venerable Archbishop uninfluenced by these malicious speeches, in his opinion of Alphonsus or his design, sent for the holy man, and encouraged him to prosecute his good work, an encouragement which, though well meant, was little needed, as Alphonsus, nothing daunted, went the mission by himself in the confidence that God in his own time would provide him with fellow-labourers. The man of God was not disappointed in his expectations; after a while he was joined by father John Mazzini, and as others began to flow in apace, Alphonsus submitted to the holy see the rules he had drawn up for the government of the congregation, and which met with the entire approval of the Pope.

The congregation being now distributed into different houses, the brethren set about the election of a superior-general, and were unanimous in their choice of Alphonsus,

whom they appointed general for life. The manifest protection extended by Divine Providence to the society, conciliated the prejudices of the most hostile, and they were now as zealous in reparation as they had before been violent in disapproval. Our saint's father, who had so unremittingly opposed his movements, seeing that the congregation every day acquired stability and strength, visited his son in Ciorani, and deeply affected by the sanctity of Alphonsus and his companions, with many tears begged admission as a lay-brother, but was constantly refused. We shall not go into many details upon the government of the holy superior-general; suffice it to say, that he united the greatest humility with the highest dignity—the greatest meekness with the most unlimited command—and all the virtues of the subject with all the qualities of the superior. Bound to enforce the observance of the rule, he was himself the most perfect model of regularity; his poverty was absolute and his obedience subjected him not only to his directors, but to the lay-brothers. These, however, are alike the virtues of the superior and the subject; but in the qualifications, which are peculiarly those of the superior, Alphonsus was equally pre-eminent. He made a yearly visitation of all the houses of his order; and as soon as he had completed the visitation, addressed to each house a circular replete with tender piety, and spiritual learning, breathing the most ardent charity towards God and his neighbour, and expressive of the tenderest love for the congregation. He was wont to embody in short and pithy sentences, the whole duty of a missionary of the congregation, or place the observance of the rule in a new and striking light. Thus he has been heard to say, that a missionary of the congregation should be a hermit within doors, and an apostle abroad; and that he who disrespected the rule, disrespected Jesus Christ—as the rule being the way to

perfection, and consequently to Heaven, was Jesus himself, who is "the way, the truth, and the life." If there were need of reproof, he never resorted to public admonition until after the second offence; being of opinion that public correction, though beneficial to the community, is seldom useful to the offender. To the novices he was peculiarly affectionate and fatherly; and not only to those immediately under his jurisdiction, but to the novices of all the other houses, whose superiors he instructed to be all openness and love to them. When, as sometimes happened, the number of applicants for admission to the congregation exceeded the means of support which its poverty supplied, Alphonsus never refused admission to those of whose vocation he had hopes, saying that the poverty of the society should not be an obstacle in the way of their vocation, and that God never suffered his levites to remain unprovided for.

In training the students for their missionary labours, every other study was of course subordinate to the great object of the congregation—the ministry of the divine word—and it was the anxious care of Alphonsus to impress them with correct notions upon this all-important matter. He instructed them to avoid defacing the simplicity of the gospel with the frippery of rhetoric, or even the genuine beauties of purely human eloquence. If their sermons, he said, were not perfectly intelligible to all, they were not as they ought to be; if the dullest old woman were unable to understand them, they were not as they ought to be; if they were in the persuasive words of human wisdom, and not in the simplicity of the gospel, they were not as they ought to be; if they were not, in fine, the fruit of piety and meditation, they could not, he said, be what they ought to be. He took especial care that they should fit themselves for the confessional by the study of moral theology; which, he said, should finish

only with the life of the student, and without the knowledge of which, a confessor, he said, would damn himself, and bring ruin on his penitents. He instructed them, moreover, in the proper treatment of different classes of penitents, impressing upon them the necessity of sweetness and charity, the danger of severity and harshness, and the importance of using to advantage their discretion in giving or withholding absolution in those cases where the church has left either course open to them.

When Alphonsus, or any of his companions, travelled to the place where they were to preach the mission, it was on foot, or if the distance were great, on horseback, it being meet, he said, that those who had taken upon them the apostleship, should preserve to it all its simplicity. Having arrived at his destination, he went straight to the principal church; and after a short time spent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, mounted the pulpit, and exhorted the people to profit by the present grace, which might never be vouchsafed them again if they were to abuse the divine mercy by not taking advantage of the time afforded them for penance. The following days were taken up by a morning and evening sermon; separate catechetical instructions for the young and the adults; the recitation of the rosary, and the hearing of confessions. After nightfall some of the fathers went through the most populous parts of the city, or country, as the case might be, holding up a crucifix, reminding the people in a loud voice of their last things,* and inviting them to listen to the sermons. Alphonsus, who always preached the evening sermons, was accustomed to discipline himself three times during the course of the mission; once during the sermon upon sin; once during that upon hell; and once during that on scandal; during which last he caused all his com-

* Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven.

panions to discipline themselves likewise, in order to fill the people with a sovereign horror of that dreadful evil. After the general evening sermon, the women left the church, and Alphonsus addressed a discourse to the men, exciting them to compunction, and to discipline themselves. After he had closed the sermons *di terrore*, or operating by fear, he entered upon another exercise of three or four days, called by him the exercise of a devout life, consisting of instructions upon prayer and its necessity, and of meditations upon the passion of Jesus Christ, which Alphonsus proposed with so much unction and tenderness, as to draw torrents of tears from his entire audience.

Next came the general communions, and these he distributed through four days, according to the several conditions of the communicants. On each of the four days he endeavoured to excite sentiments of compunction and the love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. First came the communion of the boys and girls under the age of fourteen; next, that of the maidens and widows, which lasted for some days, during which he addressed them on the value of chastity; then came the communion of married women; before which they were enlightened upon the duties of their state; and lastly, on some festival day the communion of the men took place;—the entire mission closing with a sermon upon perseverance, and solemn benediction. Nor must we omit to mention, that during all this time, the fathers of the mission were obliged to spend seven hours every morning in the confessional, which they could not leave without permission from himself, or from the president of the mission, whoever he might be.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the wonders wrought by Alphonsus in the places which he visited during his missionary career. The conversions which followed his preaching, and his prayers, are, in point of fact, as well as in the eye of faith, the most stupendous

of these wonders ; but, as the suspension of the laws of nature, as those sensible miracles with which the Almighty was pleased to glorify his servant, are most likely to make an impression upon us, carnal generation that we are, we shall select one of the most remarkable of these, and give it to our readers.

Towards the close of a mission concluded by Alphonsus, the town of Amalfi was like another Ninive, so plenteous were the tears, and so exemplary was the penance of its inhabitants. Alphonsus addressing them one day upon devotion to the Blessed Virgin, exclaimed, "Ah ! you do not pray to her as you ought—I shall address her for you." He then turned towards a statue of the Blessed Virgin, and proceeding in a strain of enraptured eloquence, was observed by the congregation to rise some feet above the ground ; while, at the same time, the statue of the Blessed Virgin all radiant, beamed upon the extatic Alphonsus, and the entire multitude exclaimed, a miracle ! a miracle ! This lasted for some time, when Alphonsus returning to himself, assured the congregation that it had found favour with the Blessed Virgin.

The sanctity of Alphonsus, and the wonders by which his preaching was attended, began to attract the notice of the entire kingdom, and, amongst others, of Cardinal Spinelli, who immediately fixed his eye upon him for promotion to the episcopacy. Shortly after, the Archbishopric of Palermo becoming vacant, the king determined upon appointing Alphonsus to that dignity, saying, "If the Pope appoint good bishops, I shall appoint still better." Alphonsus, who upon the mere suspicion of Cardinal Spinelli's designs, had left his unfinished mission in Naples, was dreadfully alarmed when he heard of the king's intention, and bestirred himself so vigorously to counteract it, that he did at length succeed, and was consoled by witnessing the appointment of

another. But his joy was of short duration, and his escape from the burthen of the episcopacy proved to be nothing more than a reprieve; for the see of Sant' Agata de' Goti becoming vacant, he was nominated by the Pope himself to the care of that church. Alphonsus having recovered from the desolation into which he was thrown by the announcement of this intelligence, addressed a letter to the Pope, setting forth his unfitness for that high office, as well by reason of his infirm health, and advanced age, as of his spiritual unworthiness. The Holy Father upon receiving the letter of Alphonsus was deeply moved by the pathetic remonstrances of the saint; and, on the evening of the 14th of March, communicated to his Pro-auditor, Cardinal Negroni, his intention of allowing Alphonsus to decline the dignity; but, on the following morning, informed Cardinal Negroni, that God had inspired him during the night to have Alphonsus consecrated. The Pro-auditor then, by command of the Pope, wrote to Alphonsus, acquainting him with the determination of His Holiness, and put him upon his obedience.

The immediate superior of the house having received and read this letter, as he had been commissioned to do by Alphonsus, proceeded, along with some other fathers, to communicate to him the will of His Holiness. Immediately upon entering his apartment, they desired him to say an Ave Maria, which he did accordingly upon his knees, whilst his entire frame bore testimony to the painful workings of his mind. They then proceeded to read to him the letter of the Pope, which when they had finished, he exclaimed, "Obmutui quoniam tu fecisti Domine, gloria Patri, etc." Then turning to his companions with tearful eyes, "God," he said, "takes me from the congregation for my sins; ah, and we must part, after thirty years of love?" But immediately afterwards expressing the

most entire resignation to the divine will, he placed the Pope's letter upon his head, and several times repeated, "God will have me a bishop, and a bishop will I be." Somae advised him to remonstrate with the Pope again. "No," said Alphonsus, "the Pope has put me on my obedience, and I have nothing else for it;" having said which, he was seized with convulsions so violent as to deprive him of the use of speech for more than five hours. A fever of an aggravated nature then set in, caused by his lively dread of the responsibility he was about to incur, and the account which he should have to render. The fever was at its height after nine days, and his recovery was almost despaired of. "If he die," said the Pope, "he shall have our apostolic benediction—if he recover, let him repair to Rome." It was the will of God that Alphonsus should recover; and immediately upon his restoration to health, he prepared to set out for Rome, in compliance with the orders of His Holiness.

Meanwhile the companions of our Saint, in sore affliction at their approaching bereavement, and unwilling to lose his sweet and fatherly government, having assembled in chapter, confirmed him in the perpetual superior-generalship, empowering him at the same time to govern through one of his vicars, when he should find it necessary: and this decree, in order to its greater stability, they submitted to the sacred congregation of bishops and superiors of orders, by whom it was confirmed on the 25th of May, 1762.

Alphonsus having accepted the episcopal office, through pure obedience, as we have seen, set out for Rome accompanied by Father Andrea Villani, a man of approved virtue. It was his original intention to proceed to Rome in the miserable dress which he usually wore, but he was induced by the urgent solicitations of his companions to wear a somewhat more seemly garb, although of suffi-

ciently coarse texture. In passing through Velletri, he was received with demonstrations of the greatest respect, by Cardinal Spinelli, who insisted on his passing an entire day with him. Having arrived in Rome on the 11th of April, he declined occupying the apartment which the Prince of Piombine had prepared for him in his own palace, and accepted only the carriage as being absolutely necessary. He took up his residence at the house of the fathers called, "Pii Operarii," but hearing that the Pope was then at Castel Gandolfo, Alphonsus thought he could not better employ the intermediate time, than by visiting the holy house at Loretto. During a fortnight of his residence at Loretto, he contrived to remain unknown, visiting our Lord in the holy chapel early in the morning and late in the evening; but at the end of the fortnight, he was recognized by a Father Penitentiary of the Society of Jesus, and thus received the demonstrations of esteem and veneration which he so much dreaded.

Alphonsus, having received intelligence of the return of the Pope to Rome, set out for the city with all possible despatch; and, immediately upon his arrival, had an audience of the Holy Father. His Holiness received him with the greatest cordiality, conversing with him during three hours upon matters of the greatest importance to the church; and, amongst other things, upon the practice of frequent communion, which Alphonsus had recommended in a book published at Rome, and which the Pope knew to have been opposed in print. His Holiness, who had had personal experience of the conduciveness of this practice to the good of souls, desired Alphonsus to support his work against its adversaries; and the saint complied in such a stile as to leave the Pope equally astonished at his learning and his humility. Alphonsus, previous to his consecration, had several other audiences of the Holy Father,

who, upon one occasion after having dismissed the bishop elect, said to Monsignor Pasquale Mastrilli, Archbishop of Nazareth, "After the death of Monsignor Liguori we shall have another saint in the church of God."

During his residence in Rome, notwithstanding his retired habits, and the scantiness of his retinue, (a single servant,) he was paid the most distinguished respect by generals of religious orders, bishops, princes, and cardinals. Almost every moment of his sojourn in the Eternal City he spent in austere watchings, disciplines to blood, constant adoration of the most holy Sacrament, and the exercise of acts of mercy. Having been at length formally declared bishop of Sant' Agata de' Goti, by the Sovereign Pontiff, in the secret consistory held on the 14th of June, 1762, Alphonsus was consecrated on the 20th of the same month, the third Sunday after Pentecost, in the sixty-sixth year of his age, in the Church of St. Mary Sopra Minerva, by Cardinal de Rossi, assisted by Monsignor Gorgoni, Archbishop of Emessa, and Monsignor Giordani, Archbishop of Nicomedia, governor of Rome. As soon as he had been consecrated, Alphonsus took leave of the Sovereign Pontiff, unwilling that he should be absent from his church a moment longer than was necessary.

The holy bishop having arrived in Naples amid the congratulations of the entire city, withdrew to San Michele de' Pagani, to arrange matters connected with his congregation, and appointed Father Andrea Villani his vicar-general, to administer the affairs of the congregation in his room. Upon his return to Naples, many persons of the highest distinction, as well as many of his former colleagues, endeavoured to detain him there, and dissuade him from his precipitate journey to Sant' Agata, which seemed to portend so constant a residence in that unwholesome town as would prove ruinous to his health. Their remon-

c

strances, however, were ineffectual, and he set out on the 11th of July, accompanied by his brother Hercules, and Father Francis Margotto. His journey through the country was like the triumphal procession of a conqueror. He was met at every stage by reverential multitudes, and welcomed into Sant' Agata by the citizens, and the chapter of the diocess. Having proceeded to the Church, he spent some time in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and then addressing the people in a moving strain, gave them his benediction and the indulgence usual upon such occasions. The very next morning he began the mission to the people, which he continued during eight days, giving each morning spiritual exercises to the clergy, secular and regular, as well as to the gentry; so that shortly after his arrival, the entire aspect of the city and diocess had undergone a most surprising and consoling change.

Alphonsus in the government of his diocess, simply carried out the principles which he had laid down in a book, entitled "Reflections useful to bishops in the government of their Churches," and published before his elevation to the episcopacy. Though removed in body from his congregation, it ceased not to be directed by his spirit, as he was in constant communication with Father Villani, and the superiors of houses, continually exhorting and instructing them by letters full of unction and wisdom alike divine. His elevation to the episcopal dignity no wise prejudiced that eminent spirit of poverty by which he had been distinguished while residing with the congregation. His dress (invariably the habit of the congregation) was of the coarsest texture, and the clergy of his household, or others interested, were obliged to resort to an order from his confessor, or some such expedient, to induce him to exchange his single suit, no matter how old or tattered, for a new one; whilst the pectoral cross was the only orna-

ment worn by him significant of his pastoral dignity. The spirit of poverty, jointly with his compassion for the poor, led him to consult economy in the most trifling details of his household affairs. The chapter was obliged to interfere to prevent the total dismantlement of the palace; an event which they succeeded in retarding only, not in finally preventing, for, upon being obliged to leave Sant' Agata by reason of his health, he ordered the principal furniture of the palace to be sold, and the proceeds applied to the adornment of the Cathedral. He retained, after his promotion, a practice which he had while yet a simple missionary, of using the blank leaves and backs of letters, for his correspondence with familiar friends, or for draughts of the works he was about to publish. His secretary, indeed, remonstrated with him, but Alphonsus was firm. What shame is it? he enquired; holy poverty is the characteristic of a bishop. He left the best apartments to his household clergy, occupying himself, a couple of the most unpretending, and furnished in the meanest style, possessing, in fact, only some straw chairs, a table with an inkstand and a few books, a small wooden bedstead with a straw bed, and coarse sheets, some pictures of saints, and one of our blessed Lady of good counsel, together with a little altar for the celebration of Mass, when his health should not permit him to go to the Cathedral. His table was originally very simple, and every day experienced new retrenchments, until it reached the standard of insipidity, which Alphonsus had laid out for it. The cook, with whom nothing could induce him to part, spoiled the little that he dressed, having it either badly seasoned, or too salt, or raw, or burned. To endure this might have seemed to others mortification sufficient; but Alphonsus was insatiable of mortification, and took measures of his own to increase the insipidity, and nauseousness of what

he eat. His household resembled nothing so closely as a religious community, so regular were the hours of prayer, and silence, and meals, and religious converse. The extent (we shall not presume to say excess,) to which he carried his bodily austerities and disciplines, was absolutely frightful. His secretary upon one occasion, alarmed by the violence with which, from the sound of the discipline he knew the saint was scourging himself, was strongly tempted to burst open the door, and wrest the discipline out of his hands; but we shall, perhaps, give a still more striking instance of the terrible rigour of Alphonsus towards his innocent flesh, when we relate that a Dominican father, one of the Saint's synodal examiners, was obliged to leave the episcopal palace, and return to his convent in the middle of the night, so terrified was he by the vehemence, with which the noise led him to believe Alphonsus scourged himself.

If Alphonsus, by reason of his pastoral cares, was unable to pray as much as he could have desired during the day time, he abridged to a mere nothing, the hours of repose, spending the greater part of the night in meditation, or those appalling acts of penance which we have mentioned. The little time which he contrived to steal from his pastoral cares, or his devotions, he spent not in recreation, but in writing, or dictating letters, or composing works for the good of souls, or reading spiritual or theological books. An application unintermitting as was his, could not, unless by miracle, fail to prejudice his health, and in addition to his other infirmities, he began to be afflicted with grievous head-aches. But it mattered not, for even when obliged to go out in his carriage, he had his secretary to read a book to him, so that he contrived not to allow a single moment to pass unoccupied. And, lest by possibility, a single imperfection should escape his notice, he

appointed a discreet and pious priest to make him acquainted with anything he should observe in him, which might require correction.

Alphonsus, who was in every respect so perfect a model of pastoral perfection, was in nothing more admirable than in his strict observance of the duty of residence.—Not only did he hasten, at the peril of life, to take possession of his episcopal residence in the unwholesome town of Sant' Agata; but, during the thirteen years of his abode in the diocese, never availed himself of the privileges granted by the Council of Trent, and only absented himself upon three occasions of the most pressing nature: First, to attend a general chapter of the congregation; a second time, in obedience to the physicians; and for the last time, before his final removal, he spent a month in Naples, to conduct a most just and interesting suit upon the part of his Congregation.

Alphonsus having fallen sick in Arienzo during one of his yearly visitations, had no sooner recovered his health sufficiently to travel, than he began to think of returning to Sant' Agata, and the representations of his vicar-general regarding the unsafe condition of a portion of the palace, should have been ineffectual had not the doctors insisted upon his remaining where he was; the damp and insalubrious air of Sant' Agata being peculiarly hurtful to one afflicted as he was with asthma. But neither his infirmities, nor his withdrawal from the usual seat of episcopal government, caused him to suspend for a day the instructions, private, as well as public, which he was in the habit of giving his flock. He preached as usual on Sundays and holidays; and on Saturdays, in honour of the blessed Virgin; he continued to give missions, conduct retreats, and attend at conferences; in a word, he never permitted his health to interfere with the discharge of any of those duties which, even holy bishops deem

themselves justified in devolving upon others. He catechised in person, the infants of both sexes, holding out, and awarding with his own hand, little prizes for their encouragement. He gave audience to persons of either sex, or any degree, who wished to consult him upon their wants and occasions, spiritual or temporal, but summarily dispatched all visits of mere compliment; and once a year made a visitation of half the diocess, so that he saw every portion of it once in two years. In travelling he rode upon an ass, or hired mule, (his equipage he had early disposed of,) and made use of no other conveyance, no matter how great his infirmities, or what the badness of the road. During the course of the visitation, he every where addressed the people, confirmed the children, and inspected the churches, even in the poorest and remotest districts; his household, his table, and his devotions, wherever he resided being the same as in Sant' Agata. To the sick of his entire diocess he was attentive, and not satisfied with relieving their wants when they thrust themselves upon him, took measures to discover such wants as might not have attracted his notice. In the administration of justice in his episcopal court, he was so assiduous and vigilant, and weighed so well both sides of the question, that there never was an appeal from his decision to that of the Archiepiscopal Court of Benevento: and with regard to ecclesiastical privileges and immunities, though not so tried, he was full as unflinching an asserter of the church's rights, as was St. Thomas of Canterbury. A criminal having once fled for sanctuary to a church, was taken thence by the officers of justice, and an application to the local magistrate for his release, not having been granted, Alphonsus, after warning, proceeded to excommunicate the magistrate, and did not desist until the prisoner had been discharged, saying, that were it to cost him

his mitre, the immunities of the church should be protected.

If the clergy of a diocese do not correspond with the solicitude of their chief pastor, his exertions for the good of souls are very little worth; and it was for this reason that Alphonsus laboured, by word and work, to render his clergy conformable to the model which he exhibited to them in himself, saying to them by implication, in every good advice he gave them, "*imitatores mei estote sicut et Ego Christi.*"

There were many things in the clergy requiring reformation, when our saint came to the government of the diocese; and he effected a total change, at once so rapidly and noiselessly, that the people perceived it to be finished almost before they had perceived it to be in progress. To the canonries and other benefices in his gift, he collated none whose moral and intellectual fitness he had not ascertained; the moral, by personal experience, or strict investigation, and the intellectual, by what is technically termed, a "*concursum*," or an examination, properly speaking, of two or more candidates, but sometimes of one only. The superior of his diocesan seminary, a man of approved virtue and learning, being candidate for a deanery, the examiners who had formerly been students under him declined to exercise their functions in his regard. He was not, however, on this account, exempted from the examination, for Alphonsus procured other examiners, and, after a proper scrutiny, advanced him to the deanery, with which the office of penitentiary also was connected. When the nomination rested with the King or Pope, Alphonsus never recommended any one whom he did not think entirely fit, or than whom he believed he could find one better qualified. He has been known to deny the suit of the Prince of Riccia, the Duke and Duchess of Maddaloni, patrons of

Sant' Agata, and the Archbishop of Bari severally; deeming unfit the persons whom they begged him to recommend. Nor was this strictness confined to his choice of dignitaries only, he was equally exact in the appointment of every priest who was to have the cure of souls, and sit in the tribunal of penance. The rules which he drew up for the conduct of his seminary, were equally admirable with every other portion of his government; providing not only for the maintenance of discipline and piety within doors, but for the practice of piety by the students in their own homes during the vacation, at the close of which, if they meant to be readmitted, they should bring with them a certificate of their religious conduct, signed on oath by the parish priest. Need we add, that his care in ascertaining the fitness of those who were sufficiently advanced for promotion to orders, corresponded with those early precautions; or, that he endeavoured to keep green in the memory of his priests, the principles of sacred science and piety by frequent conferences, which they were obliged to attend under pain of suspension, unless able to adduce some valid reason? It was with a view to the improvement of his clergy, and in order to supply them with new facilities for preaching the divine word, that he composed the digest, called "Sermons for all the Sundays of the Year," lately translated into English, and the present volume, both of which however, may with advantage be used by the faithful indiscriminately. As a book for those engaged in the conduct of spiritual retreats, and for the clergy in general, but for them exclusively he composed the admirable "Selva," in which, says the eminent French translator, the Holy Ghost and all the fathers of the church are made to address the clergy, upon their numerous and awful duties.

✓ The regular clergy and conventuals of his diocese, men, and women, claimed his most paternal attention. He did

his utmost, and with the most perfect success, to improve the character of those peculiarly catholic institutions, especially such as were under the invocation of the Mother of God. His beautiful work entitled the "True Spouse of Jesus Christ, or the Nun Sanctified," will be read with peculiar spiritual advantage by nuns, and with vast profit by any religious whosoever.

If Alphonsus was attentive to the sanctification of the clergy and sacred virgins of his diocese, Oh! how zealously and unremittingly did he not labour for the simple faithful? Not satisfied with his continual preaching by word and example, or his yearly visitations, or the missions he gave in person, or those which he procured by inviting missionaries from other diocese, or providing the people with virtuous and learned clergy; not satisfied with all this, he traced vice and scandals to their strongholds. Verily he was an angel of peace, and went about doing good, reconciling those at variance, and even inducing those who had been really and grievously injured to forgive the wronger. A youth having at one time been mortally wounded, Alphonsus hastened to his dwelling, and prevailed upon himself and his mother to forgive the murderer. We could wish to cite another instance at least, but this one must suffice out of the many which we have on record.

He exerted himself with the most astonishing activity to put down the absurd and atrocious practice of duelling, often personally interfering to prevent hostile meetings; and at length memorialing the king to put in force those laws which had been directed against duelling in the kingdom of Naples. But there was no vice or scandal which he pursued and extirpated with so much zeal as that of immorality, in the more received and restricted sense. It would be impossible to enumerate all the licentious men and abandoned women whom he re-

claimed, in very many cases by personal exertion, and often by judicious advice to the civil authorities, who always received it with respect by reason of the esteem in which they held the Saint. Knowing well however that poverty is often the most fatal incentive to vice, he procured honest employment for such young women as he had fears of, and respectable matches for others, giving them portions out of his own revenue. Some whom he reclaimed he sent to asylums of penance ; and against those whom he could not reclaim, he called in the arm of the law.

✓ Having been obliged to remove for a while to Nocera de' Pagani for the benefit of the air, a woman of improper character whom he had expelled the diocess, took advantage of his absence to return. So grievously did this intelligence distress him, that Monsignor Valpe, bishop of that city, enquired the cause of his alarm with much concern. "I am a bishop," was the reply given by Alphonsus ; and neither the remonstrances of Monsignor Valpe, nor of his friends, could restrain Alphonsus from returning forthwith to his diocess, and having the abandoned woman brought before him, to whom he spoke in such a moving strain, that she was really converted by his words, and died in a Naples asylum a true penitent.

He was anxious not only to prevent public scandals, but to do away with anything that could lessen the salutary influence of his government upon the people ; and, for this reason, compensating a company of players who had settled in his diocess, induced them to depart without exhibiting.

Carefully as Alphonsus provided for the spiritual wants of his flock, he was not less assiduous in ministering to their temporal necessities. He knew well that the man who has not bowels of compassion for his neighbour, cannot love God, and that the funds of the church are the patrimony of the poor. We have already seen how

rigid was the economy of Alphonsus in his household concerns, and that this was produced partly by charity ; but to whatever it was owing, the poor had all the benefit of it. So chary was he of the patrimony of the poor, as he called the revenues of his church, that he would not entertain his brother Hercules and his two children for more than three days, saying, that to entertain them longer than that, would be to defraud the poor. His brother imagining that the revenues of the diocess were more than sufficient for the maintenance of Alphonsus, as a bishop, thought he would relinquish to him the pension which he enjoyed from the estate ; but this Alphonsus declined, saying, that the proceeds of his diocess belonged to the poor, and that he required the income for his support. At another time, one of the houses of the congregation being in a state of utter destitution, the superior applied to Alphonsus for some assistance ; but the Saint informed him, that all his money belonged to the poor of the diocess, and that he should look to God for aid elsewhere.

He had an alms for every one who asked it, and summoned his vicar-general and others to the aid of his own zeal in discovering such as shame (so ill-consorted with penury,) prevented from putting in their petitions with the others. Superannuated priests, old people of every description, widows with families, and more especially young maidens whose poverty might be the occasion of their fall, were the objects of his tenderest care. We have already mentioned his care of the sick ; and it was at least equalled by his care of those in prison, both as concerned their spiritual and temporal wants. But all his other acts of love were outdone by one act of stupendous charity, in the year 1765, during which Italy was afflicted in a great and prevailing famine. As if in preparation for the disastrous season, Alphonsus, contray to custom, had laid

up a large store of corn, and as soon as the scarcity began to be felt, distributed it to the poor. After having expended his entire store, he wrote to every one of wealth and distinction, and more especially to his brother Hercules, to contribute to the relief of the starving population. He afterwards gave orders for the secret sale of the carriage and mules which his brother had presented to him, as well as of his pectoral cross, and the ring given him by Monsignor Gianini, substituting for them gilded things of trifling value. But, notwithstanding all his efforts, thousands remained unsupplied, and in the madness of their hunger attacked the corporate officers; for whose safety Alphonsus has been known to expose his own life to the fury of the mob.

Alphonsus had for some time been very weakly, and in bad health, but even while labouring under a disorder, or rather a complication of disorders, which the physicians looked upon as most dangerous, and in fact mortal, he preserved the utmost serenity and joyousness. In 1769 the people of Arienzo, where Alphonsus then resided, called for a procession and novena to propitiate the Almighty, and draw down rain upon the languishing country; and Alphonsus, although from the nature of his disorder he could scarce move an inch, insisted upon preaching in the church himself, attracting thither immense crowds, and edifying those even who could barely hear his voice, without distinguishing a word. And now in addition to his former sufferings, he became afflicted with a rheumatic fever of the most malignant nature. To be moved or shifted was a most intolerable suffering, and compliance with the wants of nature a perfect agony. His secretary and the canons exerted themselves in vain to induce him to send to Naples for physicians; he replied, that he should be content with those whom God had provided for him in his diocese, but he was at length obliged by Father Villani

to receive the visits of doctors from Naples, who amongst other remedies, prescribed the use of warm baths, a thing most repugnant to his virginal modesty, and which put him upon several expedients to prevent its being offended in his person.

But the rheumatism was not the only, nor indeed the most grievous disorder by which Alphonsus was affected. A gangrenous sore upon his breast, caused by the friction of his chin, which continually lay upon it, had not only eaten into the flesh, but was now beginning to affect the bone; everything threatened mortification, and death its inevitable result. The alarming progress of the sore was in a great measure, if not entirely, owing to the circumstance before mentioned of the Saint's beard being merely clipped, not shorn; but whatever the cause, it now looked so threatening that it was deemed prudent to administer to him the sacrament of Extreme Unction. His secretary, however, who still had hopes of his recovery—hopes which the event soon justified—summoned another eminent physician from Naples, who prevented the mortification from setting in, and in a short time caused the sore itself to disappear.

All this while our saint not only never murmured, but preserved the utmost composure. Every morning he heard mass and communicated in his chamber, never allowing any of his mortifications to suffer interruption, or diminution beyond what obedience to his medical and spiritual superior rendered imperative. Nor did he anywise relax in his attention to the affairs of the diocese: the examination of clerics, the mission amongst the people, the conferences in theology, and every thing else went on as usual under his active superintendence, and though he was unable to make the visitation of the diocese as usual, (which duty he now devolved upon his vicar general,) yet he failed not to preach on all occasions, and the bare sight

of his poor suffering limbs and bent neck, sufficed to fill the multitudes who flocked to hear him, not only with compassion for himself, but with the tenderest love of God. In a word, he left no duty unfulfilled, for while his vicar general made the visitation, Monsignor Puoti, Archbishop of Amalfi, administered the sacrament of confirmation, in various places at his request.

To his utter affliction, he had for some time been obliged by the position of his head (leaning as it did upon his breast,) to give up saying mass, as he could not without infinite danger receive the sacred species of blood. Indeed it was with great difficulty he could at any time contrive to swallow a drop of water, until the expedient of a tube, suggested to him by a religious of the Society of Jesus, having proved successful, enabled him to drink with the greatest ease imaginable. Charmed with this discovery, his friends exhorted him to apply to the Pope for a dispensation, enabling him to receive the divine blood through such a tube ; but as this is a privilege usually in the exclusive enjoyment of the Sovereign Pontiff, Alphonsus was too humble to think of becoming a sharer in it, and therefore declined applying to the Pope. God, however, "had regard to the humility of his servant ;" for shortly afterwards, an Augustinian father proposed to Alphonsus that he should receive the adorable blood seated, and assisted by a priest in surplice and stole, who should take care to prevent the occurrence of any accident ; and the Saint infinitely delighted with this expedient, and fortified by the opinions on several divines upon this subject, renewed with unspeakable joy of spirit, the celebration of our awful mysteries.

Alphonsus had accepted the bishopric through pure obedience, and ever held it with fear and trembling ; but after a time his advanced years and complicated infirmities,

raised grievous scruples in his mind upon the score of incapacity, inducing him to think of resigning his office into the hands of the Pope, and retiring with his permission to one of the houses of the congregation. Lest however, as he said: "The cell to which he should retire, might be to him a hell in consequence of his having withdrawn from an office in which God wished him to remain;" he took counsel of learned and pious men, and finding them favourable to his resignation, applied to Clement XIII. who had appointed him, for his removal; and received for answer, that his name alone was sufficient, for the well-ordering the diocess. He received this answer with perfect submission to the will of God, as intimated to him by His Holiness; but after a time, his increasing infirmities awakening new scruples in his breast, and supplying him with new reasons for requesting the acceptance of his resignation, he applied to Clement XIV. and received for answer, that one prayer from his bed of pain, would be more worth than a thousand visitations and disciplines to blood; for the Saint had put forward his inability to make the visitation of his diocess as a ground for his removal.

Alphonsus again bowed in submission to the will of God, and it was to no purpose that his own scruples, or the representations of bishops his advisers, and others, solicited him to renew his application to that Pope. "If I apply," he said, "my application will not be granted; we shall see what his successor will do for me," an answer which almost tempted those who heard him to smile, Alphonsus being brought to the grave's edge by infirmity and years, while the Pope was yet hale and vigorous. For five weary years after this did Alphonsus continue to govern his diocess, and break to his flock the bread of the divine word. Ascending the pulpit, his feeble step propped upon several supporters, his worn frame and drooping

head moved every one to tears, but no sooner had he begun to speak, than he was renewed in youth and vigour; his nerves and sinews relaxed from their habitual rigidity, and he preached with all his natural vehemence and fervour. Upon leaving the pulpit, he relapsed into his former state. By order of the physicians, he was now obliged to procure a carriage and take an airing every day, together with eating meat in lent, and sundry other indulgences which mortified Alphonsus infinitely more than could have done the most grievous austerity.

For thirteen years had Alphonsus borne the burthen of the episcopacy, when, on the 21st of September, 1774, being seated in his arm chair, he fell into a tranquil slumber, which lasted not only that night, but during a portion of the next day, the servant having orders from the vicar-general not to disturb him. On the 22nd, about one o'clock in the afternoon, he awoke, and pulled the bell. Seeing the attendants in tears, he enquired of them, what was the matter? and, on being told that he had not eaten nor spoken for two days, "True," he replied, "I have been to attend the Pope, who has just expired," and, as shortly afterwards came to be known, the Pope had actually just expired at that very moment.

Upon the earliest opportunity Alphonsus made application to Pius the VI. for permission to retire from his office, and that Pontiff, although at first disposed to act as his predecessor had done, knowing that the bare presence of Alphonsus was enough to sanctify the diocese, was at length induced by the representations of many distinguished persons to accede, though (as he said) with great sorrow, to the request of Alphonsus, and accept his resignation.

Immediately that Alphonsus had received the welcome intelligence, "blessed be God," he exclaimed, "who has removed a mountain from my breast?" and, in a few

days after, having arranged all matters for his departure, left the diocese amid the lamentations of the entire flock, and directed his course towards San Michele de' Pagni where there was a house of his order. Having reached his destination, he humbly besought the fathers to receive him once more amongst them. As he ascended the stairs, leading to the choir, he repeated the "Gloria Patri," and exclaimed, "how light is not now this cross upon my breast, which was so heavy when first I mounted the steps of the palace of Sant' Agata?" Here he lived completely after the manner of the other fathers of the congregation, attending all the exercises where and when it was done by the rest of the community, and enjoying every distinction and indulgence, the carriage drives, the two apartments, the silver service, and the invalid fare by mere compulsion, and solely through obedience. For the rest, the Pope had given him permission to retain the portable altar in his chamber for his own use, and that of others, and had assigned him a pension of eight hundred ducats upon the diocese of Sant' Agata, which occasioned him so many scruples, that he wrote concerning it to the Grand Penitentiary, who left the affair in the hands of the Saint's confessor, and thus set him at ease. Of this pension, however, the Saint appropriated barely what was necessary and distributed the rest amongst public mendicants, or private pensioners of his. For many years he continued to preach in several of the neighbouring churches, and especially in the parish church of Saint Michael, where his congregation was engaged in giving the mission. Upon one occasion during a season of terrible drought, wretchedly infirm as he was, he dragged himself along an entire street in a procession, with a halter about his neck, a crown of thorns upon his head, and his garments covered with ashes. He foretold to the people the happy result of the procession; and, it is useless to say, that the pre-

d

diction was soon verified. During all this time he ceased not to compose works for the sanctification of souls.—Amongst other works composed and published by him after his return to San Michele de' Pagni, he gave to the world the book entitled, “Admirable Dispositions of Divine Providence, for the Salvation of the World, through means of Jesus Christ;” and dedicated to Pius VI., who was pleased to acknowledge it as an especial favour, and compliment the blessed author in the loftiest, and, at the same time, most affectionate strain. But the health of Alphonsus, which had been all along declining, began rapidly to grow worse. From the 29th of November, 1779, he was unable to say Mass, and continued thence forward to communicate in one kind; his manner of life, being, in other respects as before described. Indeed, we should rather say, that in proportion to the increase of his decrepitude, and weakness, his abstemiousness and general spirit of mortification increased, and he certainly would have persevered in the use of that dreadful implement of penance the discipline, to his last breath, had he not been forbidden by his confessor, and when obliged to part with it and its fellows, he ordered his lay-brother in attendance to throw into some sewer the box in which he used to keep them.

Although the Saint in detaching his affections from all things in this world, had weaned his heart from all mere earthly affection to his relations, he still watched unceasingly over their salvation. At the end of every interview he counselled them to attend to it; and prevailed upon his niece, Donna Teresina, to become a Benedictine nun, in the convent of St. Marcellinus, in Naples.

Alphonsus, who had now for some years, as we have mentioned, been unable to say Mass, still took his airing in the carriage, and was helped into the church; but, from the 25th of September, 1784, he was obliged to

give up the drive; and, from the 30th of October following, was confined to his room. His sight now began to fail him, and he grew deaf, so as to render it necessary for him to be addressed through a speaking trumpet. But his resignation to the will of God was perfect. "I am deaf, O Lord," he exclaimed; "let me be more deaf, if it so please you;" and some person happening to speak of the loss of reason during one's last moments. "Preserve me from that, my God," he said, "because then I could not make an act of your love when dying—but yet—do with me what you please." Alphonsus distinctly foretold the year of his death, on the 13th of September, 1786, saying to a Carmelite priest: "Father Joseph, I shall die next year, pray to God and the Queen of Sorrows for me;" and here we must not omit to mention, that he had a peculiar devotion to the dolours of the Mother of God, as may be seen from one of the sermons in this volume. A few days before his death, he said to the lay-brother, Francis Anthony Romito: "Yet a few days, and I shall be in the performance of another function," meaning the new position he was to occupy in the church upon his bier.

On the 18th of July, 1787, in addition to his old complaints, he was attacked by a sharp fever, together with a terrible dysentery and retention of urine. These were symptoms so little to be mistaken, that, although he had been absolved three days before by Father Vincenzo Magaldi of the congregation, he confessed again to Father Lorenzo Negri of the congregation also, and after having received absolution, was released from all his usual anxiety, and broke forth into expressions of the liveliest joy and hope, the Lord being doubtless willing to console his servant by a foretaste of Paradise, for all that he had made him suffer during this life, and especially for the grievous temptations against faith, by which he had been

assailed sometime after his retirement from his diocess. His sufferings lasted for fourteen days, during which he was constantly engaged in acts of piety, keeping his eyes lovingly fixed upon the crucifix and image of the blessed Mother; confessing frequently, and communicating every day.

The news of his mortal illness having been spread abroad, priests, secular as well as regular, and persons of the highest distinction, came from all parts to kiss his hand, bringing kerchiefs, and other such things, to sanctify by contact with him, and preserve as relics. At length it became necessary for him to receive the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which he did with the most fervent acts of faith, hope, charity, resignation, and joy. On the 25th of the same month, he received the Blessed Sacrament as a viaticum; and when the time for communicating approached, every moment appeared intolerably long, and unable to contain himself, he incessantly exclaimed, give me the body of my Jesus—when will Jesus come to me?—when shall I possess him? His longings having been at length satisfied, he sunk into a long and deep meditation upon the love of Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament.

Some time after, the lay-brothers in attendance approached his bed, and begged to have his blessing in reward of their long and faithful service. Alphonsus immediately lifting his hand, blessed them in the words of the Church: "*Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, descendat super vos et maneat semper.*" Having been reminded by Father Lorenzo Negri, that he had still to bestow his blessing on all the houses and fathers of the congregation, as well as upon the chapter and diocess of Sant' Agata, which then widowed by the death of Monsignor Rossi, the successor of St. Alphonsus, he complied; and then, without a suggestion from any

one, said with much solemnity and emphasis, "I bless the fathers of the kingdom; I bless the King, his ministers, generals, and judges, who shall invoke the intercession of the saints, and do justice." His nephew, Joseph, having come to visit him, threw himself upon his knees by the bedside of his dying uncle. The Saint tenderly stretching out his hand to him, said frequently, I thank you; and then being asked for something by way of a memorial, gave him much wholesome advice, and finished by telling him to save his soul.

Four days before his death he was seized with convulsions so violent as to deprive him of the use of speech. On the thirtieth day of the month, Father Villani not thinking it safe to give him the Viaticum, as he was afraid he should not be able to swallow, one of the fathers desired him to make a spiritual communion, which he did, shewing by his eyes and various signs, that he joined in the devout sentiments suggested by that father. On the day before his death, Monsignor Tafuri came to visit him, and seeing him so near his dissolution, reverentially kissed his hand, and placed it on his head. On the day of his death, just before the commencement of his agony, upon hearing the names of Jesus and Mary, he opened his eyes and appeared somewhat to revive. What is even more surprising, on the night before his death, the image of the blessed Mother having been brought near his bed, he not only opened his eyes, but fixing them upon it, smiled sweetly, his countenance all radiant with delight. Whence we may all conclude, that the divine Mother blessed her holy client with one of those visits which it was his daily prayer to have at the hour of death, and which he so often held out to all who should be devout to Mary.

Alphonsus straining the crucifix and image of most holy Mary to his breast, the brethren in tears and

prayer around him, calmly and without struggle or contortion, breathed forth his blessed soul, on Tuesday, the 1st of August, 1787.

It would be useless to add anything even to these meagre details in praise of a saint, decidedly the greatest of modern times, and excelled by very few in any age. It will, I suppose, be in the recollection of the reader in what manner we promised to test the pretensions of Alphonsus to the title of great amongst the sons of God. "Qui fecerit," says the gospel, "et docuerit sic homines, hic magnus vocabitur in regno Cælorum." That he was a model of all virtue, few will be found bold enough to dispute; and if some of our separated brethren have envied us St. Bernard, I think they should feel proud to be able to call St. Liguori their's. No one, I think, will be disposed to deny that he has made out his claim to the first ingredient of heavenly greatness, that of having "done;" and for the second, rich in the accumulated treasures of the Holy Scriptures, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church—rich in the treasures revealed to him by the Spirit of God in meditation—rich in the treasures of experience; he poured all these treasures into the bosom of the faithful by apostolic words and writings—establishing thus his title to the second ingredient of heavenly greatness, that of having "so taught men."

This being so, it became the duty of the Church, after the juridical proof of the miracles which must always, according to her wise ordinances, precede the enrolment of any of her children amongst the saints—it became her duty to make him great in the veneration of the faithful on earth, whom God had made great in the kingdom of his glory.

On the 21st day of December, 1809, the venerable Pontiff Pius VII. issued the decree for the beatification

of Alphonsus, and on the 26th of May, 1836, our Most Holy Father, Gregory, after having gone through the glorious proofs of his sanctity, vouchsafed to the Church by the Almighty, after the beatification of his servant, proceeded with the solemn ceremony of canonization, or enrolment amongst the saints.

NOTE.—St. Francis Girolamo, of the Society of Jesus, when the infant Alphonsus was presented to him for his blessing, not only blessed him, but said to his mother, “This child shall live to the age of Ninety, shall be a Bishop, and perform great things for Jesus Christ.” This remarkable prophecy was inadvertently omitted in the text.

DECLARATION OF ST. LIGUORI.

CONFORMABLY to the decrees of Urban VIII., I declare, that for the miracles and miraculous gifts attributed, in this book, to divers servants of God, and which have not yet received the sanction of the Holy See, I expect no belief beyond what is usually given to history supported by human authority—and I further declare, that in styling any one Saint, or Blessed, who has not yet been canonized or beatified, I do so merely in compliance with the familiar custom of men.

SERMONS

OF

SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI.

SERMON THE FIRST.

The Lord appears angry, not that he means to punish us, but in order that we may cleanse ourselves of our sins, and thus enable him to pardon us.

“Heu consolabor super hostibus meis et vindicabor de inimicis meis.”—*Isa. i. 24.*

“Ah, I will comfort myself over my adversaries : and I will be revenged of my enemies.”

SUCH is the language of God, when speaking of punishment and vengeance : He says that he is constrained by his justice, to take vengeance on his enemies. But, mark you, he begins with the word—“Heu,” “ah :” this word is an exclamation of grief, by which he would give us to understand, that if he were capable of weeping when about to punish, he should weep bitterly at being compelled

B

to afflict us his creatures, whom he has loved so dearly as to give up his life through love for us. "Heu," says Cornelius a Lapide, "*dolentis est vox non insultantis : significat se dolentem et invitum punire peccatores.*" No, this God who is the father of mercies, and so much loves us, is not of a disposition to punish and afflict, but rather to pardon and console us. "Ego enim scio cogitationes quas ego cogito super vos ait Dominus, cogitationes pacis et non afflictionis."—Jer. xxix. 11. "For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of affliction." But some one will say, since such is his character, why does he now punish us? or, at least, appear as if he meant to punish us? Why so? Because he wishes to be merciful towards us: this anger which he now displays, is all mercy and patience. Let us then, my brethren, understand how the Lord at present appears in wrath, not with a view to our punishment, but in order that we may cleanse ourselves of our sins, and thus enable him to pardon us. Such is the subject of our discourse. God threatens to chastise in order to deliver us from chastisement.

The threats of men ordinarily proceed from their pride and impotence; whence, if they have it in their power to take vengeance on an object they threaten nothing, lest they should thereby

give their enemies an opportunity of escape. It is only when they want the power to wreak their vengeance, that they betake themselves to threats, in order to gratify their passion, by awakening at least the fears of their enemies. Not so the threats of which God makes use, on the contrary, their nature is quite different. His threats do not arise from his inability to chastise, because he can be avenged when he wills ; but he bears with us in order to see us penitent, and thus exempt from punishment. "Thou overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance."—Wis. xi. 24. Neither does he threaten from hatred, in order to torment us with fear ; God threatens from love, in order that we may be converted to him, and thereby escape chastisement : he threatens, because he does not wish to see us lost : he threatens, in fine, because he loves our souls. "*Parcis autem omnibus quoniam tua sunt Domine, qui amas animas.* But thou sparest all, because they are thine, O Lord, who lovest souls."—Wis. xi. 27. He threatens ; but notwithstanding bears with us and delays the infliction, because he wishes to see us converted not lost. "*Patienter agit, propter vos nolens aliquem perire, sed omnes ad pœnitentiam reverti.*" "He dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance."—2 Peter iii. 9. Thus the threats of

God are all acts of tenderness, and amorous calls of his goodness, by which he means to save us from the punishment which we deserve.

“Yet forty days,” exclaimed Jonas, “and Nineve shall be destroyed.”—Jonas iii. 4. Wretched Ninevites, he cries, the day of your chastisement is come ; I announce it to you on the part of God : Know, that within forty days Nineve shall be destroyed, and cease to exist. But how comes it that Nineve did penance and was not destroyed ? “ And God had mercy.”—Ibid. 10. Whereat Jonas was afflicted and making lamentation before the Lord, said to him—“ Therefore, I went before thee into Tarsis, for I knew that thou art a gracious and merciful God, patient and of much compassion, and easy to forgive evil.”—Jonas iv. 2. He then left Nineve, and was screened from the rays of the burning sun, by an ivy which God caused to overshadow his head. But how did the Lord next act ? He withered the ivy, whereat Jonas was so much afflicted that he wished for death. God then said to him, “ Thou hast grieved for the ivy for which thou hast not laboured, nor made it to grow and shall not I spare Nineve ?”—Jonas iv. 10. Thou grieveest for the ivy which thou hast not created, and shall not I pardon the men who are the work of my hands ? The destruction which the Lord caused to be held out against Nineve, was, according to

the explanation of St. Basil, not an actual prophecy, but a simple threat, by which he meant to bring about the conversion of that city. The saint says, that God often appears in wrath because he wishes to deal mercifully with us ; and threatens, not with the intention of chastising but of delivering us from chastisement : "*Indignans miseretur et minitans salvare desiderat.*" St. Austin adds, that when any one cries out to you "take care," it is a sign he does not mean to injure you : "*Qui clamat tibi, observa : non vult ferire.*" And thus exactly does God act in our regard, he threatens us with chastisement, says St. Jerome, not that he means to inflict it, but to spare us if we profit by the warning. "*In hoc clementia Dei ostenditur : qui enim prædicit pœnam non vult punire peccatores.*" You, O Lord, says St. Gregory, are severe, but then most so when you wish to save us ; you threaten, but in so threatening you have no other object than to bring us to repentance : "*Sævis et salvas ; terris et vocas.*" The Lord could chastise sinners without warning by a sudden death, which should not leave them time for repentance ; but no, he displays his wrath, he brandishes his scourge ; in order that he may see them reformed, not punished.

The Lord said to Jeremiah : thou shalt say to them—"If so be, they will hearken and be converted every one from his evil way : that I may

repent me of the evil which I think to do unto them.”—Jer. xxvi. 3. Go, he says, and tell the sinners if they wish to hear you, that if they cease from their sins, I shall spare them the chastisements which I intended to have inflicted on them. And now, my brethren, mark me. The Lord addresses you in a similar way out of my mouth. If you amend, he will revoke the sentence of punishment. St. Jerome says, “*Neque Deus hominibus sed vitiis irascitur.*” God is wroth, not with us, but with our sins ; and St. Chrysostom adds, that if we remember our sins God will forget them. “*Si nos peccatorum meminerimus Deus obliviscetur.*” He desires that we being humbled should reform, and crave pardon of him. “Because they are humbled I will not destroy them.”—2 Paral. xii. 7.

But, in order to amend, we must be led to it by fear of punishment, otherwise, we never should be brought to change our lives. True it is, God protects him who places hope in his mercy. “He is the protector of all who trust in him.”—Ps. xvii. 31. But he who hopes in the mercy of the Lord is always the man who fears his justice. “They that fear the Lord have hoped in the Lord : he is their protector and their helper.”—Ps. cxiii. 11. The Lord often speaks of the rigour of his judgments, and of hell, and of the great number who go thither.” Be not afraid of them

who kill the body fear ye him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.”—Luke xii. 4, 5. “Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who enter thereat.”—Matt. vii. 13. And why does the Lord so often speak thus? In order that fear may keep us from vice, and from the passions, and from occasions; and that thus we may reasonably hope for salvation, which is only for the innocent, or the penitent who hope and fear. O what strength has not the fear of hell to rein us in from sin! To that end has God created hell. He has created us, and redeemed us by his death, that we might be happy with him, he has imposed upon us the obligation of hoping for eternal life, and on that account encourages us, by saying that all those who hope in him shall be saved. “For, none of them that wait on thee shall be confounded.”—Ps. xxiv. 2. On the other hand, it is his wish and command that we should be in fear of eternal damnation. Some heretics hold, that all who are not in sin should consider themselves as assuredly just and predestined; but these have with reason been condemned by the Council of Trent,—(Sess. 6, can. 14 & 15,) because, such a presumption is as perilous to salvation as fear is conducive to it. “And let him be your dread, and he shall be a sanctification unto you.”—Isa. viii. 13, 14. The

holy fear of God makes man holy. Wherefore, David begged of God the grace of fear, in order that fear might destroy in him the inclinations of the flesh. "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear."—Ps. cxviii. 120.

We should then fear on account of our sins, but this fear ought not to deject us ; it should rather excite us to confidence in the divine mercy, as was the case with the Prophet himself. "For thy namesake, O Lord, thou wilt pardon my sin for it is great."—Ps. xxiv. 11. How is that ? Pardon me because my sin is great ? Yes, because the divine mercy is most conspicuous in the case of greatest misery ; and he who has been the greatest sinner, is he who glorifies most the divine mercy, by hoping in God, who has promised to save all those who hope in him. "He will save them, because they have hoped in him."—Ps. xxxvi. 40. For this reason it is, Ecclesiasticus says, that the fear of the Lord bringeth not pain but joy and gladness : "The fear of the Lord shall delight the heart, and shall give joy and gladness."—Eccles. i. 21. Thus this very fear leads to the acquisition of a firm hope in God, which makes the soul happy : "He that feareth the Lord shall tremble at nothing, and shall not be afraid, for he is his hope : The soul of him that feareth the Lord is blessed."—Eccles. xxxiv. 16, 17. Yes, blessed, because fear draws

man away from sin. "The fear of the Lord driveth out sin," (Eccles. i. 27,) and at the same time infuses into him a great desire of observing the commandments: "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord: he shall delight exceedingly in his commandments."—Ps. cxi. 1.

We must, then, persuade ourselves that chastisement is not what the nature of God inclines him to. God, because by his nature he is infinite goodness, (*"Deus cujus natura bonitas,"*) says St. Leo, has no other desire than to bless us, and to see us happy. When he punishes he is obliged to do so, in order to satisfy his justice, not to gratify his inclination. Isaiah says, that punishment is a work contrary to the heart of God. "The Lord shall be angry that he may do his work, his strange work his work is strange to him."—Isa. xxviii. 21. And, therefore, does the Lord say, that he sometimes almost feigns the intention of punishing us: "*Ego fingo contra vos malum.*" But why does he do so? For this reason: "Let every man of you return from his evil way."—Jer. xxviii. 16. He does so in order to our reformation, and consequently our exemption from the chastisement deserved by us. The apostle writes, that God "hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth." Rom. ix. 18. With regard to

which passage, St. Bernard says, that God of himself wishes to love us, but that we force him to condemn us : " *Sed quod misereatur proprium illi est : nam quod condemnat, nos eum cogimus.*" He calls himself the father of mercies, not of vengeance. Whence it comes that his tenderness all springs from himself, and his severity from us. And who has ever been able to comprehend the greatness of the divine mercies ? David says, that God, even while yet angry, feels compassion for us : " *Thou hast been angry and hast had mercy on us.*"—Ps. lix. 1. " *O ira misericors,*" exclaims the abbot Beroncosio, " *quæ irascitur ut subveniat minatur ut parcat.*" O merciful wrath, which art enkindled but to succour, and threatenest but to pardon. " *Thou hast shewn,*" continues David, " *thou hast shewn thy people hard things, thou hast made us drunk with the wine of sorrow.*" God discovers himself to us armed with a scourge, but he does so in order to see us penitent and contrite for the offences which we are committing against him : " *Thou hast given a warning to them that fear thee : that they may flee before the bow : that thy beloved may be delivered.*" He appears with the bow already bent, upon the point of sending off the arrow, but he does not send it off, because he wishes that our terror should bring about amendment, and that thus we should escape the chastisement.

“That thy beloved may be delivered.” I wish to terrify them, says God, in order that struck by fear they may rise from the bed of sin and return to me. “In their affliction they will rise early to me.”—Osee. vi. 1. Yes, the Lord although he sees us so ungrateful and worthy of punishment, is eager to free us from it, because how ungrateful soever we be, he loves us and wishes us well. “Give us help from trouble.” Thus, in fine, prayed David : and thus ought we to pray. Grant, O Lord, that this scourge which now afflicts us, may open our eyes, so that we depart from sin ; because, if we do not here have done with it, sin will lead us to eternal damnation, which is a scourge enduring for ever. What shall we then do my brethren ? Do you not see that God is angered ? He can no longer bear with us. “The Lord is angry.” Do you not behold the scourges of God increasing every day ? “*Crescit malitia crescit inopia rerum.*” Our sins increase, says St. Chrysostom, and our scourges increase likewise : God, my brethren, is wroth : but with all his anger he has commanded me to say, what he formerly commanded to be said by the prophet Zachary : “And thou shalt say to them, thus saith the Lord of Hosts : turn ye to me saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn to you saith the Lord of Hosts.”—Zach. i. 3. Sinners, saith the Lord, you have turned

your backs upon me, and therefore have constrained me to deprive you of my grace. Do not oblige me to drive you for ever from my face, and punish you in hell without hope of pardon. Have done with it : abandon sin, be converted to me, and I promise to pardon you all your offences, and once more to embrace you as my children. "Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn to you." Why do you wish to perish ? (mark how tenderly the Lord speaks). "And why will you die, O house of Israel."—Ezech. xviii. 31. Why will you fling yourselves into that burning furnace ? "Return ye and live." Ibid. 32. Return to me, I await you with open arms, ready to receive and pardon you.

Doubt not of this, O sinner, continues the Lord. "Learn to do well And then come and accuse me, saith the Lord : if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow."—Isa. i. 17, 18. Take courage, saith the Lord, change your life, come to me, and if I do not pardon you, "accuse me : " As if he were to say, accuse me of lying and bad faith ; but, no, I shall not be unfaithful, your conscience now so black shall by my grace become as white as snow. No ; I will not chastise you if you reform, says the Lord because I am God not man. "I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath

because I am God and not man.”—Osee. xi. 9. He says besides, that men never forget an injury, but that when he sees a sinner penitent, he forgets all his offences. “I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done.—Ezech. xviii. 22. Let us then at once return to God, but let it be at once. We have offended him enough already, let us not tempt his anger any further. Behold him, he calls us, and is ready to pardon us if we repent of our evil deeds, and promise him to change our lives.*

* Here, and at the close of each succeeding Sermon, may be introduced Acts of Faith, Hope, and Sorrow, &c., with a Petition to the Mother of God for her intercession.

SERMON THE SECOND.

Sinners will not profit by the divine threats until the chastisement has come upon them.

“ Si Pœnitentiam non egeritis omnes similiter peribitis.”

“ Except you do penance you shall all likewise perish.” *Luke* xiii. 5.

AFTER our Lord had commanded our first parents not to eat of the forbidden fruit, unhappy Eve approached the tree and was addressed from it by the serpent, who said to her : Why has God forbidden you to eat of this delightful fruit ? “ Why hath God commanded you ? ” Eve replies : “ God hath commanded us that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die.”—*Gen.* iii. 3. Behold the weakness of Eve ! The Lord had absolutely threatened them with death, and she now begins to speak of it as doubtful : “ Lest perhaps we die.” If I eat of it, she said, I shall perhaps die. But the devil seeing that Eve was little in fear of the divine threat, proceeded to encourage her by saying : “ No, you shall not die the death ; ” and thus he deceived her, and caused her to prevaricate and eat the apple. Thus, even now, does the enemy continue to deceive so many poor sinners. God threatens : stop, sinners, and do penance, be-

cause if not you shall damn yourselves, as so many others have done : "Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." The devil says to them : "No, you shall not die the death." Fear nothing, sin on, continue to enjoy yourselves, because God is merciful ; he will pardon you by and by, and you shall be saved. "Deus timorem incutit," says St. Procopius, "Diabolus adimit." God only desires to terrify them by his threats, in order that they may depart from sin, and thus be saved. The devil wishes to destroy that fear, in order that they may persevere in sin, and thus be lost. Many are the wretches who believe the devil in preference to God, and are thus miserably damned. At present, behold the Lord displays his anger and threatens us with chastisement. Who knows how many there may be in this country who have no thought of changing their lives, in the hope that God will be appeased, and that it will be nothing. Hence the subject of the present discourse. Sinners will not profit by the divine threats, until the chastisement shall have come upon them. My brethren, if we do not amend, the chastisement will come ; if we do not put an end to our crimes, God will.

When Lot was warned by the Lord that he was about to destroy Sodom, Lot at once informed his sons-in-law : "Arise ! get you out of this

place, because the Lord will destroy this city.”—Gen. xix. 14. But they would not believe him : “ And he seemed to them to speak as it were in jest.” They imagined that he wished to sport with their fears, by terrifying them with such a threat. But the punishment overtook them, and they remained to be the sport of the flames. My brethren, what do we expect ? God warns us that chastisement hangs over us ; let us put a period to our sins, or shall we wait for God to do it ? Hear, O sinner ! what St. Paul says to you : “ See, then, the severity and goodness of God—towards them, indeed, that are fallen, the severity—but towards thee the goodness of God, if thou abide in goodness, otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”—Rom. xi. 22. Consider, says the apostle, the justice which the Lord has exercised towards so many whom he has punished, and condemned to hell ; “ towards them, indeed that are fallen, the severity.” Consider the mercy with which he has treated you ; ‘ but towards thee the goodness of God.’ You must abandon sin ; if you change your ways, avoid the occasions of sin, frequent the sacraments, and continue to lead a christian life, the Lord will remit your punishment, “ if you abide in goodness ;” if not you shall perish, “ otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” God has already borne with you too long, he can bear with you no

longer. God is merciful, but he is just withal ; he deals mercifully with those who fear him ; he cannot act thus towards the obstinate.

Such a person laments when he sees himself punished, and says, why has God deprived me of my health? why has he taken from me this child, or this parent? "Ah, sinner! what have you said," exclaims Jeremiah, "your sins have withholden good things from you." It was not the desire of God to deprive you of any blessing, of any gain, of your son, or your parent ; it would have been the wish of God to make you happy in all things, but your sins have not allowed him. In the book of Job, we read these words : "Is it a great matter that God should comfort thee? but thy wicked words hinder this."—Job. xv. 11. The Lord would fain console you, but your blasphemy, your murmuring, your obscene words spoken to the scandal of so many, have prevented him. It is not God, but accursed sin, that renders us miserable and unhappy. "Sin maketh nations miserable."—Prov. xiv. 34. We are wrong in complaining of God when he deals hardly with us. Oh! how much more hardly do we deal with him, repaying with ingratitude the favours which he has bestowed on us! "Quid quærimur, dum dure agit nobiscum Deus? multo durius cum Deo nos agimus."

Sinners imagine that sin procures them happi-

C

ness ; but it is sin which makes them miserable, and afflicted in every respect. "Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God," saith the Lord, "in joy and gladness of heart thou shalt serve thy enemy, whom the Lord will send upon thee, in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and in want of all things till he consume thee."—Deut. xxviii. 47, 48. Because thou hast not wished to serve thy God in the peace which all those taste who serve him, thou shalt serve thy enemy in poverty and affliction, until he shall have finished by making thee lose both soul and body. David says, that the sinner by his crimes, digs himself the pit into which he falls : "He is fallen into the hole he made."—Ps. vii. 16. Recollect the prodigal son : he, in order to live without restraint, and banquet as he pleased, left his father ; but then, for having left his father, he is reduced to tend swine ; reduced to such a degree of misery, that of the vile food with which the swine are filled, he has not wherewithal to fill himself : "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him."—Luke xv. 16. St. Bernardine of Sienna, (dom. 2. Quadrag.) relates that a certain impious son, dragged his father along the ground. What happened to him afterwards ? One day he was himself dragged by his own son in like manner, when arriving at a certain place, he exclaimed,

“ No more—stop here, no more—thus far did I drag my own father—stop.” St. Baronius mentions a circumstance of a like nature, (all anno 33. num. 6.) concerning the daughter of Herodias, who caused John the Baptist to be beheaded. He tells of her, that one day as she was crossing a frozen river, the ice broke under her, and she remained with her head only above the aperture. By dint of her struggles to save herself from death, she had her head severed from her body, and thus died. Oh, how just is not God, when the time of vengeance arrives ! he causes the sinner to be caught, and strangled in the net which his own hands have made. “ The Lord shall be known when he executeth judgments, the sinner hath been caught in the works of his own hands.”—Ps. ix. 17.

Let us tremble, my brethren, when we see others punished, knowing, as we do, that we ourselves have deserved the same punishments. When the tower of Siloe fell upon eighteen persons and killed them, the Lord said to many who were present : “ Think you that they also were debtors above all the men that dwelt in Jerusalem.”—Luke xiii. 4. Do you think that these wretches alone were in debt to God’s justice on account of their sins ? You are yet debtors to it ; and if you do not penance, you shall be punished as well as they : “ Except you do penance,

you shall all likewise perish." O, how many unfortunate men damn themselves by false hope in the divine mercy? Yes, God is merciful, and therefore assists and protects them who hope in his mercy: "He is the protector of all that trust in him."—Ps. xvii. 31. But he assists and protects those only who hope in him, with the intention of changing their lives, not those whose hope is accompanied by a perverse intention of continuing to offend him. The hope of the latter is not acceptable to God, he abominates and punishes it: "Their hope the abomination of the soul." Job xi. 20. Poor sinners, their greatest misery is, that they are lost, and do not know it. They jest, and they laugh, and they despise the threats of God, as if God had assured them that he should not punish them. "Et unde," exclaims St. Bernard, "unde hæc maledicta securitas?" Whence, O blind that you are, whence this accursed security? accursed, because it is this security which brings you to hell. "I will come to them that are at rest, and dwell securely."—Ezech. xxxviii. 11. The Lord is patient, but when the hour of chastisement arrives, then will he justly condemn to hell those wretches who continue in sin, and live in peace, as if there were no hell for them.

Let sin be no more for us, my brethren, let us be converted if we wish to escape the scourge which hangs over us. If we do not cease from

sin, God will be obliged to punish us : “ For evil doers shall be cut off.”—Ps. xxxvi. 9. The obstinate are not only finally shut out from Paradise, but hurried off the earth, lest their example should draw others into hell. And let us reflect that these temporal scourges are nothing in comparison with those eternal chastisements, hope of relief from which there is none. Give ear, O sinner ! my brother, give ear ! “ For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.”—Luke iii. 9. The author of the “ Imperfect Work,” in his comment upon this passage (hom. 5,) says : “ Non ad ramos posita dicitur, sed ad radicem, ut irreparabiliter exterminetur.” He says, that when the branches are lopped, the tree continues still to live ; but when the tree is felled from the root, it then dies and is cast into the fire. The Lord stands with the scourge in his hand, and you still continue in disgrace with him. “ The axe is laid to the root.” Tremble lest God should make you die in your sins, for if you die thus, you shall be cast into the fire of hell, where your ruin shall be hopeless for eternity.

But, you will say, I have committed many sins during the past, and the Lord has borne with me. I may, therefore, hope that he will deal mercifully with me for the future. God says, do not speak so : “ Say not I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me ? for the Most High is a

patient rewarder."—Eccl. v. 4. Do not say so, for God bears with you now, but he will not always bear with you. He endures, to a certain extent, and then pays off all. "Now, therefore, stand up, that I may plead in judgment against you concerning all the kindness of the Lord," (1 Kings xii. 7.) said Samuel to the Hebrews. O how powerfully does not the abuse of the divine mercies assist in procuring the damnation of the ungrateful! "Gather them together as sheep for a sacrifice, and prepare them for the day of slaughter."—Jer. xii. 3. In the end the herd of those who will not be converted shall be victims of divine justice, and the Lord will condemn them to eternal death, on "the day of slaughter," when the day of his just vengeance shall have arrived, (and we have reason always to be in dread, as long as we are not resolved to abandon sin,) lest that day should be already near. "God is not mocked; for what things a man shall sow, these also shall he reap."—Gal. vi. 7, 8. Sinners expect to mock God by confessing at Easter, or two or three times a year, and then returning to their vomit, and hoping after that to obtain salvation. "He is a mocker, not a penitent," says St. Isidore, "who continues to do that for which he is penitent;" but "God is not mocked."

What salvation?—what salvation do you ex-

pect? "for what things a man shall sow, them also shall he reap." What things do you sow? blasphemy, revenge, theft, impurity : what then do you hope for? He who sows in sin, can hope to reap nothing but chastisements and hell. "For he that soweth in his flesh," continues the same apostle, "of his flesh also shall reap corruption." Continue, impure wretch! continue to live sunk in the mire of your impurity, be converted into pitch within his bowels, ye his impurities. "A day shall come," says St. Peter Damian, "a day shall come, or rather a night, when your lust shall be turned into pitch, to feed an eternal flame within your bowels."—Epist. 6.

St. John Chrysostom says, that some pretend not to see : "*fingunt non videre*;" they see the chastisements, and pretend not to see them. And then others, St. Ambrose says, have no fear of punishment, until they see it has overtaken them : "*Nihil timent quia nihil vident*." To all these it will happen as it did to mankind at the time of the deluge. The patriarch Noah foretold and announced to them, the punishments which God had prepared for their sins ; but the sinners would not believe him, and notwithstanding that the ark was building before their eyes, they did not change their lives, but went on sinning until the punishment was upon them, until they were smothered in the deluge. "And they knew not till

the flood came and took them all away.”—Matt. xxiv. 39. The same happened to the great Babylon, in the Apocalypse, who said : “ I sit a queen, and I shall not see grief.” She persevered in her impurity, in the hope of not being punished, but the chastisement at length came as had been predicted : “ Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning, and famine, and she shall be burnt with fire.”—Apoc. xviii. 7, 8.

Brother, who knows whether this is not the last call which God may give you ? Our Lord says, that a certain owner of a vineyard, finding a fig-tree for the third year without fruit, said, “ Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none ; cut it down therefore, why cumbereth it the ground ?”—Luke xiii. 7. Then the dresser of the vine replied : “ Lord, let it alone this year also and if happily it bear fruit—but if not, then, after that, thou shalt cut it down.” Let us enter into ourselves, my brethren, for years has God been visiting our souls, and has found no other fruit therein than thorns and thistles, that is to say sins. Hear how the divine justice exclaims, “ cut it down therefore, why cumbereth it the earth ?” but mercy pleads, “ let it alone this year also.” Have courage, let us give it one trial more ; let us see whether it will not be converted

at this other call. But tremble lest the same mercy may not have granted to justice that if you do not now amend, your life shall be cut off, and your soul condemned to hell. Tremble, brother, and take measures that the mouth of the pit do not close over you. Such was the prayer of David : "let not the deep swallow me up ; and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me."—Ps. lxxviii. 16. It is that which sin effects, causing the mouth of the pit, that is, the state of damnation into which the sinner has fallen, to close over him by degrees. As long as that pit is not entirely closed, there is some hope of escape ; but if it once shut, what further hope remains for you ? By the closing of the pit, I mean the sinner's being shut out from every glimmer of grace, and stopping at nothing ; that being the accomplishment of what the wise man has said : "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth."—Prov. xviii. 3. He despises the laws of God, admonitions, sermons, excommunication, threats—he despises hell itself ; so that persons have been known to say, numbers go to hell, and I amongst the rest. Can the man who speaks so be saved ? He can be saved, but it is morally impossible he should. Brother, what do you say ? Perhaps you have yourself come to the contempt of the chastisements of God. What do you say ? Well, and

if you had, what should you do? Should you despair? No; you know what you have to do. Have recourse to the Mother of God. Although you should be in despair, and abandoned by God, Blossius says, that Mary is the hope of the despairing, and the aid of the abandoned: "*Spes desperantium, adjutrix destitutorum.*" St. Bernard says the same thing when he exclaims, the despairing man who hopes in thee ceases to be desperate: "*In te sperat qui desperat.*" But if God wishes that I should be lost, what hope can there be for me? But, says God, no, my son, I do not wish to see you lost: "*I desire not the death of the wicked.*" And what then do you desire, O Lord? I wish him to be converted, and recover the life of my grace: "*But that the wicked turn from his way and live.*"—Ezech. xxxiii. 11. Haste then, brother, fling yourself at the feet of Jesus Christ; behold him! see how he stands with his arms open to embrace you! &c.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE THIRD.

God is Merciful for a season, and then Chastises.

“Indulsisti genti Domine indulsisti genti; nunquid glorificatus es?”

“Thou hast been favourable to the nation, O Lord, thou hast been favourable to the nation; hast thou been glorified?”—

Isa. xxvi. 15.

LORD, thou hast often pardoned this people; thou hast threatened it with destruction by earthquake, by pestilence, in neighbouring countries; by the infirmities and death of its own citizens; but you have afterwards taken pity on them: “Thou hast been favourable to the nation, O Lord, thou hast been favourable to the nation; hast thou been glorified?” You have pardoned us, you have dealt mercifully with us; what have you received in return? Have thy people abandoned their sins? have they changed their lives? No, they have gone on from bad to worse; that momentary fear passed, they have begun afresh to offend thee and provoke thy wrath. But my brethren, perhaps you imagine that God will always wait, always pardon, and never punish? No; God is merciful for a season, (such is the subject of the day’s discourse,) God is merciful

for a season, then executes judgment, and punishes.

We must persuade ourselves that God cannot do otherwise than hate sin, he is holiness itself, and therefore cannot but hate that monster, his enemy, whose malice is altogether opposed to the perfection of God. And if God hate sin, he must necessarily hate the sinner who makes league with sin. "But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike."—Wisd. xiv. 9. O God, with what an expression of grief, and with what reason do you not complain of those who despise you, to take part with your enemy. "Hear, O ye Heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken; I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have despised me."—Isa. i. 2. Hear, O ye Heavens, he says, and give ear, O earth, witness the ingratitude with which I am treated by men. I have brought them up, and exalted them as my children, and they have repaid me with contempt and outrage. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel hath not known me, they are gone away backwards."—Isa. i. 3, 4. The beast of the field, the ox and the ass, continues the Lord, know their master, and are grateful to him, but my children have not known me, and have turned their back upon me. But how is this? "*Beneficia etiam feræ sentiunt,*" says Seneca; the very

brutes are grateful to their benefactors ; see that dog how he serves and obeys, and is faithful to his master, who feeds him ; even the wild beasts, the tiger and the lion are grateful to those who feed them. And God, my brethren, who, till now has provided us with everything, who has given us food and raiment : What more ? who has kept us in existence up to the moment when we offended him : how have we treated him ? how do we purpose to act in future ? Do we not think to live on as we have been living ? Do we not perhaps think that there is no punishment, no hell for us ? But harken and know that as the Lord cannot but hate sin, because he is holy, so he cannot but chastise it when the sinner is obstinate, because he is just.

When he does chastise, it is not to please himself, but because we drive him to it. The wise man says, that God did not create hell, through a desire of condemning man thereto, and that he does not rejoice in their damnation, because he does not wish to see his creatures perish : “ For God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living ; for he created all things that they might be.”—Wisdom. i. 13, 14. No gardener plants a tree in order to cut it down and burn it. It was not God’s desire to see us miserable and in torment ; and therefore, says St. Chrysostom, he waits so long before he takes ven-

geance of the sinner : “ *Ad reposcendum de peccantibus ultionem consuevit Deus morasnectere.*” He waits for our conversion, that he may then be able to use his mercy in our regard. “ Therefore the Lord waiteth, that he may have mercy on you.”—Isa. xxx. 18. Our God, says the same St. Chrysostom, is in haste to save, and slow to condemn. “ *Ad salutem velox, tardans ad demolitionem.*” When there is question of pardon, no sooner has the sinner repented than he is forgiven by God. Scarcely had David said “ *peccavi,*” when he was informed by the prophet that his pardon was already granted : “ The Lord also hath taken away thy sin.”—2 Kings xii. 13. Yes, because we do not desire pardon so anxiously as he desires to pardon us.” “ *Non ita tua condari peccata cupis,*” says the same holy doctor, “ *quam tibi remissa esse expetit.*” On the other hand, when there is question of punishment, he waits, he admonishes, he sends us warning of it beforehand : “ For the Lord God doth nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets.”—Amos, iii. 7.

But when, at length, God sees that we are willing to yield neither to benefits, nor threats, nor admonitions, and that we will not amend, then he is forced by our own selves to punish us, and while punishing us, he will place before our eyes the great mercies he before extended to us : “ Thou

thoughtest unjustly that I shall be like to thee ; but I will reprove thee, and set before thy face." He will then say to the sinner, think you, O sinner, that I had forgotten, as you had done, the outrages you put upon me, and the graces I dispensed to you ? St. Austin says, that God does not hate but loves us, and that he only hates our sins : "*Odit Deus et amat ; odit tua, amat te.*" He is not wroth with men, says St. Jerome, but with their sins : "*Neque Deus hominibus sed vitiis irascitur.*" The saint says, that by his nature God is inclined to benefit us, and that it is we ourselves who oblige him to chastise us, and assume the appearance of severity, which he has not of himself : "*Deus qui naturâ benignus est ; vestris peccatis cogitur personam, quam non habet crudelitatis assumere.*" It is this which David means to express, when he says that the Lord in chastising is like a drunken man who strikes in his sleep : "And the Lord was awaked as one out of sleep, and he smote his enemies."—Ps. lxxvii. 65. Theodoret adds that, as drunkenness is not natural to man, so chastisement does not naturally belong to God ; it is we who force him into that wrath which is not his by nature. "*Thesaurizans sibi iram, quam Deus naturaliter non habet.*" St. Jerome, reflecting on those words which Jesus Christ on the day of general judgment will address to the reprobate : "Depart from me you cursed, into

everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels ;” enquires, who has prepared this fire for sinners ? God perhaps. No, because God never created souls for hell as the impious Luther taught : this fire has been kindled for sinners by their own sins : “ *Comparaverunt delictis suis.*” He who sows in sin, shall reap chastisement. “ *He that soweth iniquity, shall reap evil.*”—Prov. xxii. 8. When the soul commits sin, she voluntarily obliges herself to pay the penalty thereof, and thus condemns herself to the pains of hell. “ *For you have said, we have entered into a league with death, and we have made a covenant with hell.*”—Isa. xxviii. 15. Hence St. Ambrose well says, that God has not condemned any one, but that each one is the author of his own chastisement. “ *Nullum prius Dominus condemnat, sed unusquisque sibi est auctor pœnæ.*” And, the Holy Ghost says, that the sinner shall be consumed by the hatred which he bears himself, “ *with the rod of his anger he shall be consumed.*” He, says Salvian, who offends God, has no more cruel enemy than himself, since he himself has caused the torments which he suffers. “ *Ipse sibi parat peccator quod patitur ; nihil itaque est in nos crudelius nobis.*” God does not wish to see us in affliction, but it is we who draw down sufferings upon ourselves, and by our sins enkindle the flames in which we are to burn. “ *Nos etiam*

nolente Deo, nos cruciamus ; nam cœlestis iræ accendimus incendia quibus ardescimus." God punishes us, because we oblige him to punish us.

But, I know, you say, the mercies of God are great : no matter how manifold my sins, I have in view a change of life by and by, and God will have mercy upon me. But no, God desires you not to speak thus. "And say not the mercy of the Lord is great, he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins."—Eccl. v. 6. And why has the Lord forbidden you to say so ? The reason is this, "for mercy and wrath quickly come from him."—Ibid. 7. Yes, it is true, God has patience, God waits for some sinners ; I say some, for there are some whom God does not wait for at all : how many has he not sent to hell immediately after the first transgression ? Others he does wait for, but he will not always wait for them ; he spares them for a certain time and then punishes. "The Lord patiently expecteth, that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them in the fulness of their sins."—2 Mach. vi. 14. Mark well, "when the day of judgment shall come : " when the day of vengeance shall arrive, "in the fulness of their sins." When the measure of sins which God has determined to pardon is filled up, he will punish. Then the Lord will have no mercy and will chastise unremittingly. The city of Jericho did

not fall during the first circuit made by the ark, it did not fall at the fifth, or at the sixth, but it fell at last at the seventh.—Jos. ix. 20. And thus it will happen with thee, says St. Austin, “*veniet septimus arcæ circuitus, et civitas vanitatis corruet.*” God has pardoned you your first sin, your tenth, your seventieth, perhaps your thousandth ; he has often called you, he now calls you again ; tremble lest this should be the last circuit taken by the ark, that is, the last call, after which, if you do not change your life, it will be over with you. “For the earth,” says the apostle, “that drinketh in the rain which cometh often upon it and bringeth forth thorns and briars is reprobate, and very near unto a curse, whose end is to be burned.”—Heb. vi. 7, 8. That soul, he says, which has often received the waters of divine light and grace, and instead of bearing fruit produces nought but the thorns of sin, is nigh unto a curse, and her end will be to burn eternally in hell fire. In a word, when the period comes, God punishes.

And let us know, that when God wishes to punish, he is able and knows how to do it. “The daughter of Sion shall be left as a city that is laid waste.”—Isa. i. 8. How many cities do we not know to have been destroyed and levelled with the ground, by reason of the sins of

the inhabitants, whom God could no longer bear with. One day, Jesus Christ being within sight of the city of Jerusalem, gazed upon it, and thinking of the ruin which her crimes were to draw down upon her, our Redeemer, who is so full of compassion for our miseries, began to weep : " seeing the city, he wept over it,"—Luke xix. 41, saying : " They shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."—Ibid. 44. Poor city, there shall not be left in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not been willing to know the grace which I gave thee in visiting thee with so many benefits, and bestowing upon thee so many tokens of my love ; whilst thou hast ungratefully despised me, and driven me away. " Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children and thou wouldst not, behold your house shall be left to you desolate."—Ibid. xiii. 34, 35. Sinful brother, who knows whether God does not at this moment look upon your soul and weep ? Perhaps he sees, that you will not turn to account this visit which he now pays you, this summons which he gives you to change your life. " How often would I and thou wouldst not." How often, says the Lord, have I wished to draw you to me by the lights which I have given you ? How often have I called you and you would not hear me ? You have been

deaf to me and fled from me. "Behold your house shall be left to you desolate." Behold I am already on the point of abandoning you, and if I abandon you, your ruin will be inevitable, irreparable.

"We would have cured Babylon but she is not humbled, let us forsake her."—Jerem. 41. 9. The physician when he sees that the patient will not adopt his remedies, which he himself carries to him with so much kindness, and which the other flings out of the window; what does he do at length? He turns his back upon him and abandons him. My brethren, by how many remedies, by how many inspirations, by how many calls has not God endeavoured to avert damnation from you? What more can he do? If you damn yourself, can you complain of God who has called you in so many different ways? God calls you by the voice of his minister, he calls you by the voice that is within you, he calls you by his favours, he calls you lastly by temporal punishments; in order that you may learn to dread those which are eternal. St. Bernardine of Sienna says, that for certain sins, more especially those which are scandalous, there is no more effectual method of doing away with them, than by temporal punishments.—"Pro talibus admonendis, nullum reperitur remedium nisi Dei flagellum." But, when the

Lord sees that his favours serve only to make the sinner more insolent in his evil life, when he sees that his threats are disregarded, when he perceives, in a word, that he speaks and is not heard ; then he abandons the sinner, and chastises him with eternal death. Therefore does he say, “ Because I called and you refused and have neglected my reprehensions, I will also laugh in your destruction and will mock when that shall come which you feared.”—Prov. 1, 24, 25, 26. You, says God, have laughed at my words, my threats, and my chastisements, your last chastisement shall come, and then I will laugh at ye. “ And it, (the rod,) was turned into a serpent.”—Exod. iv. 3. St. Bruno, in his commentary upon this passage, says, “ the rod is turned into a serpent, when they will not amend.” The eternal will succeed the temporal punishment.

O how well does not God know how to chastise, and so to order it, that from the instruments and motives of sin should be drawn the chastisement ! “ Per quæ quis peccat per hæc et torquetur.”—Sap. x. The Jews put Jesus Christ to death, for fear the Romans should seize on their possessions. “ If we let him alone,” said they, “ all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our place and nation.”—xi. 48. But the same sin of putting Jesus Christ to death, was the cause of their being shortly

after despoiled of everything by the Romans. "They feared they should lose temporal possessions," says St. Austin, "and thought not of eternal life, and so lost both."—Hom. in fer. v. Pass. In trying to save their possessions, they lost their souls, the punishment came and they lost both. Thus it falls out with many ; they lose their souls for the things of earth ; but God often condemns them to beggary in this world, and reprobation in the next.

My brethren, provoke no longer the anger of your God, know that in proportion to the multitude of his mercies towards you ; in proportion to the length of time he has borne with you, your punishment will be greater, if you do not amend. "The Lord makes up for the slowness of his chastisement," says St. Gregory, "by its grievousness when it does come." "Woe to thee Corozain," thus does the Lord speak to a soul who has abused his favours, "Woe to thee Bethsaida, for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the mighty things which have been wrought in you, they would have done penance long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes."—Luke x: 13. Yes, my brethren, if the graces which have been given to you, had been given to a Turk or an Indian, "if in Tyre and Sidon, had been wrought the mighty works which have been wrought in you," he would have now been a saint, or at least,

have done great penance for his sins ; and have you become a saint ? have you at least done penance for your many mortal sins, for your many evil thoughts, words, and scandals ? see you not how God is angry with you ? how he stands with his scourge in his hand ? Do you see not death hanging over you ?

And, what are we to do ? you enquire : are we to despair ? No, God does not wish us to despair. " Let us go with confidence to the throne of grace : " that is what we are to do, as St. Paul exhorts us, in order " that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid. "—Heb. iv. 16. Let us at once go to the throne of grace, that we may receive the pardon of our sins, and the remission of the punishment which overhangs us. By " seasonable aid " the apostle means to convey, that the aid which God may be willing to lend us to-day, he may deny to-morrow. At once, then, to the throne of grace. But, what is the throne of grace ? Jesus Christ, my brethren, is the throne of grace : " And he is the propitiation for our sins. " Jesus it is, who by the merit of his blood can obtain pardon for us, but we must apply immediately. The Redeemer, during his preaching in Juda, cured the sick, and dispensed other favours as he went along, whoever was on the spot to ask a favour of him, obtained it ; but whoever was negligent, and allowed him to pass without a request, remained as he was : " Who

went about doing good.”—Acts x. 38. It was this caused St. Austin to say : “*timeo Jesum transeuntem*,” by which he meant to express, that when the Lord offers us his grace, we must immediately correspond, doing our utmost to obtain it, that otherwise he will pass on and leave us without it. “To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”—Ps. xciv. 8. To-day God calls you, give yourself to God to-day, if you wait for to-morrow, intending to give yourself to him then, perhaps he will have ceased to call, and you will remain deserted. Mary, the Queen and the mother of mercies, is also a throne of grace, as St. Antoninus says. Hence, if you see that God is angry with you, St. Bonaventure exhorts you to have recourse to the hope of sinners. “*Si videris Dominum indignatum ad spem peccatorum confugas*.” Go, have recourse to the hope of sinners : Mary is the hope of sinners, Mary who is called “the mother of holy hope.”—Eccl. xxiv. 24. But we must take notice, that holy hope is the hope of that sinner who repents him of his evil ways, and determines upon a change of life ; but if any one pursues an evil course in the hope that Mary will succour and save him, such a hope is false, such a hope is bad and rash. Let us then repent of our sins, resolve to amend, and then have recourse to Mary, with a confidence that she will assist and save us.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE FOURTH.

Upon the four principal Gates of Hell.

“*Defixæ sunt in terrâ portæ ejus.*”

“Her gates are sunk into the ground.”—*Lam. ii. 9.*

“BROAD is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat.”—Matt. vii. 13. Hell has then different gates, but these gates stand on our earth. “Her gates are sunk into the ground.” These are the vices by which men offend God, and draw down upon themselves, chastisements and eternal death. Amongst the other vices, there are four, which send most souls to hell, and on this earth bring upon men the scourges of God ; and these four are, hatred, blasphemy, theft, and impurity. Behold the four gates, by which the greater number of souls enter hell ; and it is of these four, that I mean to speak to-day ; in order that you may amend and cure yourselves of these four vices, otherwise God will cure you of them, but by your own destruction.

The first gate of hell is hatred. As paradise is the kingdom of love, so hell is the kingdom of

hatred. Father, says such a person, I am grateful to, and love my friends ; but I cannot endure him who does me an injury. Now brother, you must know, that the barbarians, the Turks and Indians say, and do, all this : “ Do not also the Heathens this ?”—Matt. v. 47 ; says the Lord. To wish well to him, who serves you is a natural thing, it is done not only by the infidel, but even by the brutes and wild beasts. “ But, I say to you.” Hear what I say to you, says Jesus Christ ; hear my law, which is a law of love : “ Love your enemies.” I wish, that you, my disciples, should love even your enemies. “ Do good to them that hate you ;” you must do good to them that wish you ill, “ and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you ;” if you can do nothing else, you must pray for them who persecute you, and then you shall be the children of God your father : “ that you may be the children of your father who is in heaven.”—Matt. v. 44, 45. St. Austin then is right, in saying, that it is by love alone, a child of God is known from a child of the devil. “ *Sola dilectio decernit inter filios Dei, et filios diaboli.*” Thus have the saints always done ; they have loved their enemies. A certain woman had traduced the honour of St. Catherine of Sienna, and the saint attended this same woman in her sickness, and ministered to her as a servant. St. Acaius sold his garment,

to succour one who had taken away his character. St. Ambrose gave to an assassin, who had attempted his life, a daily allowance, in order that he might have wherewithal to live. Such may indeed be called the children of God. Is it a great matter, says St. Thomas of Villanova, that often when we have received an injury from any one, we forgive it at the suit of a friend who pleads for him? And shall we not do the same when God commands it?

Oh, how well grounded a hope of pardon has not he, who pardons the man who has offended him. He has the promise of God himself, who says, "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven."—Luke vi. 37. "By forgiving others," says St. Chrysostom, "you earn pardon for yourself." But he, on the contrary, who will have vengeance, how can he hope for pardon for his sins? Such a person, in saying the "Our Father," condemns himself when he says: "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." Then, when such a person wishes to take vengeance, he says to God: Lord, do not pardon me, because I will not pardon my enemies. You give judgment in your own cause, says St. John Chrysostom: "Tu in tui causâ fers sententiam."—Hom. 18. in Joan. But, be assured, that you shall be judged without mercy, if you show not mercy to your neigh-

bour. "For judgment without mercy to him that hath not done judgment."—James ii. 13. But how, says St. Austin, how can he who will not forgive his enemy, according to the command of God, have the face to ask pardon from God for his offences. "*Quâ fronte indulgentiam peccatorem obtinere poterit, qui præcipienti dare veniam non acquiescit?*" If then, my brethren, you wish to have revenge, bid adieu to paradise: "Without are dogs."—Apoc. xxii. 15. Dogs, on account of their natural fury, are taken to represent the revengeful. These dogs are shut out from paradise; they have a hell in this life; and they shall have hell in the next. "He who is at enmity with any one, (says St. John Chrysostom,) never enjoys peace, he is in everlasting trouble:" "*Qui inimicum habet nunquam fruitur pace, perpetuo æstuat.*"—Hom. 22.

But father, such a one has taken away my good name: "*Honorem meum nemini dabo.*" Such is forsooth the proverb, ever in the mouths of those hell-hounds who seek for revenge. He has taken away my honour, I must take his life. And is the life of a man at your disposal? God alone is master of life. "For it is thou, O Lord, that hast the power of life and death."—Wisd. xvi. 13. Do you wish to take vengeance of your enemy? God wishes to take vengeance of thee. Vengeance belongs to God alone. "Revenge is

mine, and I will repay them in due time.”—Deut. xxxiii. 35. But how else you say, can my honour be repaired? Well, and in order to repair your honour, you must trample under foot the honour of God. Do you not know, says St. Paul, that when you transgress the law, you dishonour God? “Thou, by transgression of the law dishonourest God.”—Rom. ii. 23. And what honour is this of yours’ that you wish to repair? It is the same as the honour of a Turk, of an Idolator: a Christian’s honour is to obey God, and observe his law. But other men will look down upon me; and so, for fear you should be looked down upon, you must condemn yourself to hell. But if you forgive, the good will praise you; wherefore it is, that Chrysostom says: if you wish to be revenged, do good to your enemy. “Beneficiis eum affice et ultus es.”—Hom. 20. 10. 6. because then, others will condemn your enemy, and speak well of you. It is not true, that he, loses his honour, who, when he has been injured or insulted, says: I am a Christian, I neither can nor will be revenged. Such a person gains, instead of losing honour, and saves his soul besides. On the contrary, he who takes revenge will be punished by God, not only in the other life, but in this also. He is obliged to fly the justice of men, after having taken that vengeance, which will

render his life henceforward miserable. What an unhappiness to live a fugitive ; to be always in dread of justice ; always in dread of the kindred of his victim ; tormented with remorse of conscience, and condemned to hell ? And let us further know, my brethren, that revenge and the desire of revenge are alike enormous, are the same sin. Should we at any time receive an offence, what are we to do ? When our passion begins to rise, we must have recourse to God, and to the most holy Mary ; who will help us, and get strength for us to forgive. We should then endeavour to say : Lord, for the love of you, I forgive the injury that has been done me, and do you in your mercy, forgive me all the injuries I have done you.

Let us pass on to the second gate of hell, which is blasphemy. Some, when things go wrong with them, do not attack man, but endeavour to wreak their vengeance upon God himself by blasphemy. Know, my brethren, what manner of sin blasphemy is. A certain author says : “every sin, compared with blasphemy, is light ;” and first of all, St. John Chrysostom says, there is nothing worse than blasphemy : “*Blasphemiâ pejus nihil.*”—Hom. 1. ad pop. Antioch. Other sins, says St. Bernard, are committed through frailty, but this only through malice : “*Alia peccata videntur procedere ex fragilitate et ignorantia, sed*

blasphemia procedit ex propriâ malitiâ.”—Serm. 33. With reason, then, does St. Bernardine of Sienna call blasphemy a diabolical sin, because the blasphemer, like a demon, attacks God himself. He is worse than those who crucified Jesus Christ, because they did not know him to be God ; but he who blasphemes, knows him to be God, and insults him face to face. He is worse than the dogs, because dogs do not bite their masters, who feed them, but the blasphemer outrages God, who is at that very moment bestowing favours on him. What punishment, says St. Austin, will suffice to chastise so horrid a crime? “*Quæ supplicia sufficiunt cum Deo fit ista tam nefaria injuria?*”—*De civit. Dei*, cap. 9. We should not wonder, says Julius III. in his twenty-third bull, that the scourges of God do not cease while such a crime exists amongst us : “*Minime mirandum si flagella non amoveantur.*”

We read in the preface to the pragmatic sanction in France, that King Robert when praying for the peace of the kingdom, was answered by the crucifix, that the kingdom never should have had peace if he had not eradicated blasphemy. The Lord threatens to destroy the kingdom in which this accursed vice reigns. “*They have blasphemed the Holy One of Israel your land is desolate it shall be desolate.*”—*Isa. i. 4, 7.*

Oh, if there were always found some one to do what St. John Chrysostom advises : “ *Contera os ejus, percussione manum tuam sanctifica.*” The mouth of the accursed blasphemer should be struck, and he should then be stoned, as the old law commanded : “ And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, dying let him die : all the multitude shall stone him.”—xxiv. 26. But it would be better if that were done which St. Louis, king of France, put in force ; he commanded by edict, that every blasphemer should be branded on the mouth with an iron. A certain nobleman having blasphemed, many persons besought the king not to inflict that punishment upon him ; but St. Louis insisted upon its infliction in every instance ; and some taxing him with excessive cruelty on that account, he replied that he would suffer his own mouth to be burned, sooner than allow such an outrage to be put upon God in his kingdom.

Tell me, blasphemer, of what country are you ? Allow me to tell you, you belong to hell. St. Peter was known in the house of Caiphas for a Galilean by his speech. “ Surely thou also art one of them,” it was said to him, “ for even thy speech doth discover thee.”—Matt. xxvi. 73. What is the language of the damned ? blasphemy, “ And they blasphemed the God of Heaven, because of their pains and wounds.”—Apoc. xvi. 11.

What do you gain, my brethren, by these your blasphemies ? you gain no honour by them. Blasphemers are abhorred even by their blasphemous companions. Do you gain any temporal advantage ? Do you not see that this accursed vice keep us for ever in beggary ? “Sin maketh nations miserable.”—Prov. xiv. 34. Do you derive pleasure from it ? What pleasure do you derive from baspheming God ? The pleasure of the damned ; and that moment of madness past, what pain and bitterness does it not leave in your heart ? Resolve to rid yourself of this vice, in any event. Take care if you do not abandon it now, that you will not carry it with you to death, as has happened to so many who have died with blasphemy in their mouths. But, Father, what can I do when the madness comes upon me ? Good God ! and are there no other means of working it off than by blasphemy ? Say, cursed be my sins. Mother of God assist me, give me patience ; your passion, your anger will pass off quickly, and you will find yourself in the grace of God after the trial. If you do not act thus, you will find yourself more afflicted and more lost than before.

Let us now pass on to the consideration of the third great gate of hell, by which so large a portion of the damned enter ; I mean theft. Some, so to speak, adore money as their God, and look

E

upon it as the object of all their desires. "The idols of the Gentiles are silver and gold."—Ps. cxiii. 4. But the sentence of condemnation has already been pronounced against such ; "nor covetous nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God."—1 Cor. vi. 10. It is true that theft is not the most enormous of sins, but St. Antoninus says that it very much endangers salvation : "*Nullum peccatum periculosius furto.*" The reason is because for the remission of other sins, true repentance only is required ; but repentance is not enough for the remission of theft, there must be restitution, and this is made with difficulty. A certain hermit had once the following vision : he saw Lucifer seated on a throne, and enquiring of one of his demons, why he had been so long about returning. The latter replied that he had been detained by his endeavours to tempt a thief, not to restore what he had stolen. Let this fool be severely punished, said Lucifer. To what purpose have you spent this time ? do you not know that he who has taken the property of another, never restores it ? And, in truth, so it is ; the property of another becomes to him who takes it, like his own blood ; and the pain of suffering one's blood to be drawn for another is very difficult to endure. We learn it every day from experience ; innumerable thefts take place, how much restitution do you see ?

My brethren, see that you take not the property of your neighbour, and if during the past you have ever failed in this respect, make restitution as soon as possible. If you cannot at once make full restitution, do it by degrees. Know that the property of another in your possession will not only be the means of bringing you to hell, but will make you miserable even in this life. Thou hast despoiled others, says the prophet, and others shall despoil thee. "Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all that shall be left of the people shall spoil thee."—Habac. ii. 8. The property of another brings with it a curse which will fall upon the entire house of the thief. "This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the earth and it shall come to the house of the thief."—Zachar. v. 3, 4 ; that is to say, (as St. Gregory Nazianzen explains it,) that the thief shall lose not only the stolen property, but his own. "Qui opes inique possidet, etiam suas amittit." The goods of another are as fire and smoke to consume everything that comes in their way.

Remember well, mothers and wives, when children or husbands bring home the property of their neighbour, remember well, to chide and reprove them ; not to applaud their action, or even consent to it by silence. Tobias hearing a lamb bleat in his house, "take heed," said he,

lest perhaps it be stolen ; restore ye it to its owners.”—Tob. ii. 21. St. Austin says that Tobias, because he loved God, did not wish to hear the sound of theft in his house : “*Nolebat sonum furti audire in domo.*” Some persons take the property of their neighbour, and then are fain to quiet their consciences by alms-deeds. Christ, says St. John Chrysostom, will not be fed with the plunder of others : “*Non vult Christus rapinâ nutriri.*” The sins of this kind, committed by the great, are their acts of injustice, their putting-others to loss, their depriving the poor of what is their due. These are descriptions of theft which require perfect restitution, and a restitution most difficult of all to make, and most likely to be the cause of one’s damnation.

We have now, lastly, to speak of the fourth gate of hell, which is impurity, and it is by this gate that the greater number of the damned enter. Some will say that it is a trifling sin. Is it a trifling sin ? It is a mortal sin. St. Antoninus writes, that such is the nauseousness of this sin ; that the devils themselves cannot endure it. Moreover, the doctors of the church say that certain demons, who have been superior to the rest, remembering their ancient dignity, disdain tempting to so loathsome a sin. Consider then, how disgusting he must be to God, who, like a dog, is ever returning to his vomit, or wallowing like a pig

in the stinking mire of this accursed vice. "The dog is returned to his vomit ; and the sow that was washed, to her rolling in the mire.—2 Ps. ii. 22. The impure say, moreover, God has compassion on us who are subject to this vice, because he knows that we are flesh. What do you say ? God has compassion on this vice. But you must know that the most horrible chastisements with which God has ever visited the earth, have been drawn down by this vice. St. Jerome says that this is the only sin of which we read, that it caused God to repent him of having made man. "It repented him that he had made man for all flesh had corrupted its way."—Gen. vi. 6, 12. Wherefore it is, Eusebius says, that there is no sin which God punishes so rigorously, even upon earth, as this : "*Pro nullo peccato, tam manifestum judicium exercuit Deus, quam pro isto.* Euseb. epist. ad Damas. He once sent fire from Heaven upon five cities, and consumed all their inhabitants for this sin. Principally on account of this sin did God destroy mankind, with the exception of eight persons, by the deluge. It is a sin which God punishes, not only in the other life, but in this also. In confirmation of this, you have only to enter the hospitals, and see there the many poor young men, who were once strong and robust, but are now weak, squalid, full of pains, tormented with lancets and caustic, and

ulcers, all through this accursed vice. "Because thou hast forgotten me and cast me off behind thy back, bear thou also thy wickedness and thy fornications."—Ezech. xxiii. 35. Because, says God, you have forgotten me and turned your back upon me, for a miserable pleasure of the flesh, I am resolved that even in this life you shall pay the forfeit of your wickedness.

God has compassion upon men subject to this sin. It is this sin which sends most men to hell. St. Remigius says, that the greater number of the damned are in hell through this vice. Father Segnier writes, that as this vice fills the world with sinners, so it fills hell with damned souls ; and before him St. Bernard wrote, "this sin draws the whole world, as it were, into sin."—Vol. iv. Serm. 21. And before St. Bernard, St. Isidore said, that "the human race is brought under the power of the devil, more by lust, than by all the other vices."—Book ii. Sent. cap. 39. The reason is, because this vice proceeds from the natural inclination of the flesh. Hence the angelic doctor says, that the devil does not take such complacency in securing the commission of any other sin as of this, because the person who is plunged in this infernal mire, remains fast therein, and almost wholly unable to free himself more. "Nul- lus in peccato tenacior quam luxuriosus," says St. Thomas of Villanova.—Cap. 1. de St. Idelph.

Moreover, this vice deprives one of all light, for the impure man becomes so blind, as almost wholly to forget God, "*Voluptates impudicæ*," says St. Laurence Justinian, "*oblivionem Dei inducunt*," *de lib. vitæ*, which is in accordance with what is said by the prophet Osee : "They will not set their thoughts to return to their God ; for the spirit of fornication is in the midst of them, and they have not known God."—Osee v. 4. The impure man knows not God ; he obeys neither God nor reason, as St. Jerome says ; he obeys only the sensual appetite which causes him to act the beast : "*Nec paret rationi qui impetu ducitur*."—St. Hier. in epist.

This sin, because it flatters, makes us fall at once into the habit of it, a habit which some carry with them even to death. You see husbands, and decrepid old men, indulge in the same thoughts, and committing the same sins, as they committed in their youth. And because sins of this kind are so easily committed, they become multiplied without number. Ask of the sinner how many impure thoughts he has consented to ; he will tell you he cannot remember. But brother, if you cannot tell the number, God can ; and you know that a single immodest thought is enough to send you to hell. How many immodest words have you spoken, in which you took delight yourself, and by which you scandalized your neighbour ? From

thoughts and words you proceed to acts, and to those innumerable impurities which those wretches roll and wallow in like swine, "*sus in volutacro luti*," without ever being satisfied, for this vice is never satisfied. But father, you will say, how can I hold out against the innumerable temptations which assail me? I am weak, I am flesh. And since you are weak, why not recommend yourself to God, and to most holy Mary, who is the mother of purity? Since you are flesh, why do you throw yourself in the way of sin? Why do you not mortify your eyes? Why do you gaze upon those objects whence temptations flow. St. Aloysius never raised his eyes to look even upon his mother. It is to be remarked moreover, that this sin brings with it innumerable others; enmities, thefts, and, more especially, sacrilegious confessions and communions, by reason of the shame which will not allow of these impurities being disclosed in confession. And let us remark here in passing, that it is sacrilege above all things, that brings upon us sickness and death; for, says the apostle, "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord;" and then he adds: "therefore are many infirm and weak among you."—1 Cor. ix. 29, 30. And St. Chrysostom in explanation of that passage says, that St. Paul speaks of persons who were chas-

tised with bodily infirmities, because they received the sacrament with a guilty conscience. "*Quandoquidem peccabant, quod participes fierent mysteriorum, non expurgatâ conscientâ.*"—Chrysot. in cap. 3. *Isaïæ*.

My brethren, should you ever have been sunk in this vice, I do not bid you be disheartened, but arise at once from this foul and infernal pit; beg of God forthwith to give you light, and stretch out his hand to you. The first thing that you have to do is to break with the occasion of sin, without that, preaching and tears, and resolutions, and confessions, all are lost. Remove the occasions, and then constantly recommend yourself to God, and to Mary the mother of purity. No matter how grievously you may be tempted, do not be discouraged by the temptation; at once call to your aid Jesus and Mary, pronouncing their sacred names. These blessed names have the virtue of making the devil fly, and stifling that hellish flame within you. If the devil persist in tempting you, persevere you in calling upon Jesus and Mary, and certainly you shall not fall. In order to rid yourself of your evil habits, undertake some special devotion to our Lady; begin to fast in her honour upon Saturdays; contrive to visit her image every day, and beg of her to obtain for you deliverance from that vice: each morning immediately that you rise, never omit

saying three "Hail Mary's" to her purity, and do the same when going to bed : and above all things, as I have said, when the temptation is most troublesome, call quickly upon Jesus and Mary. Beware brother, if you do not be converted now, you may never be converted.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE FIFTH.

External Devotions are of little use if we do not cleanse our souls from sin.

“Et nunc nolite illudere ut forte constringantur vincula tua.”

“And now do not mock, lest your bonds be tied strait.”

Isai. xxvii. 22.

GOD commands Jonas to go and preach to Ninive. Jonas, instead of obeying God, flies by sea towards Tharsis. But, behold ! a great tempest threatens to sink the ship ; and Jonas knowing that the tempest was raised in punishment of his disobedience, said to the crew of the vessel : “take me up and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you ; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.”—Jon. i. 12. And they actually did cast him into the sea, and the tempest ceased thereupon. “And the sea ceased from raging.”—Ibid. 15. Then if Jonas had not been thrown into the sea, the tempest should not have ceased. Consider well, my brethren, what we are to learn from this. It is, that if we do not cast sin out of our souls, the tempest, that is, the scourge of God, will not cease. The tempest is excited by our sins ;

the tempest which is hurrying us to destruction. "Our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."—Isa. lxiv. 6. Behold, we have penitential exercises, novenas, and exposition of the blessed sacrament ; but to what purpose are those, if we be not converted ; if we do not rid our souls of sin ? Such is the subject of our discourse. External devotions are of little use, if we do not abandon our sins ; because otherwise we cannot please God.

It is said that the pain is not removed before the thorn has been plucked out. St. Jerome writes, God is never angered, since anger is passion, and passion is incompatible with God. He is always tranquil ; and even in the act of punishing, his tranquility is not in the least disturbed. "But thou being master of power, judgest with tranquility."—Wisd. xii. 18. But the malice of mortal sin is so great, that if God were capable of wrath and affliction, it would enrage and afflict him. It is this that sinners do as far as in them lies, according to that of Isaiah : "But they provoked to wrath, and afflicted the spirit of his Holy One."—Isa. lxiii. 10. Moses writes, that when God was about to send the deluge, he declared himself to be so much afflicted by the sins of men as to be obliged to exterminate them from the earth. "And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, he said, I will destroy man

whom I have created, from the face of the earth.”
—Gen. vi. 6.

Chrysostom says, that sin is the only cause of all our sufferings and chastisements : “ Ubi est fons peccati, illic est plaga supplicii.”—In Psal. 3. Commenting upon these words in Genesis, which the Lord spoke after the deluge : “ I will place my bow in the clouds.”—Gen. ix. 13. St. Ambrose remarks that God does not say, I will place my arrow, but my *bow*, in the clouds ; giving us thereby to understand that it is always the sinner who fixes the arrow in the bow of God, by provoking him to chastisement.

If we wish to be pleasing to the Lord, we must remove the cause of his anger, which is sin. The man sick of the palsy besought Jesus Christ to restore the health of his body ; but, before granting his request, our Lord first restored his soul's health, by giving him sorrow for his sins, and then saying to him : “ Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee.”—Matt. ix. 2. St. Thomas says, that the Redeemer first removed the cause of his infirmity, namely, his sins, and then freed him from the infirmity itself : “ Iste petebat sanitatem corporis, et Dominus dat animæ, quia tanquam bonus medicus auferre voluit mali radicem.”—S. Thom. in Matt. loc. cit. Sin is the root of every evil, as we find in St. Bernardine of Sienna ; “ Causa infirmitatis sæpius sunt pec-

cata." Hence the Lord after having healed him, warned him against sin in these words : " Go thy way, and sin no more, lest something worse befall thee."—..... Ecclesiasticus said the same before our Lord ; " My son, in thy sickness cleanse thy heart from sin, and then give place to the physician."—Eccl. xxxiii. 9. You must first apply to the physician of the soul, in order that he may free you from your sins, and then to the physician of the body, that he may cure you of your disease. In a word, the cause of all our chastisements is sin ; and still more than sin, our obstinacy in it, as St. Basil says, " *Nostri causâ hæc invehuntur qui retinemus cor impœnitans.*"—In Isa. 9. We have offended God, and are, notwithstanding, unwilling to do penance. When God calls by the voice of his punishment, he desires that he should be heard ; if he be not, he shall be compelled by ourselves to curse us : " But if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord, thy God all these curses shall come upon thee, cursed shalt thou be in the city, cursed in the field, &c."—Deut. xxviii. 15, 16. When we offend God, we provoke all creatures to punish us. St. Anselm says that in the same manner as a servant, when he offends his master, draws down upon him the wrath not only of his master, but of the whole family ; so we, when we offend God, excite against us the anger of all creatures,

"Non solum iram Dei promeruimus, sed totam creationem contra nos excitavimus."—De similit. cap. 101. And St. Gregory says, that we have more especially irritated against us those creatures which we have made use of against our Creator: "Cuncta quæ ad usum pravitatis infleximus, ad usum nobis vertuntur ultionis."—Hom. 35, in Evang. God's mercy holds in those creatures, that they may not afflict us, but when he sees that we make no account of his threats, and continue to live on in our former way, he will then make use of those creatures to take vengeance on us for the injuries we have done him: "He will arm the creature for the revenge of his enemies."—Wisd. v. 18. "And the whole world shall fight with him against the unwise."—Ib. 21. "There is no creature," says St. John Chrysostom, which will not feel anger when it sees its Lord in anger."—Hom. in absol.

If then, my brethren, we do not appease God by our conversion we never shall be free from chastisement. What folly, says St. Gregory, could be more extreme, than to imagine that God should cease from chastising before we should have ceased to offend? "Est primum dementiæ genus, nolle a malis quiescere, et Deum velle a sua ultione cessare."—Mor. lib. 8. Ep. 41. Many now come to the church, and hear the sermon, but

go away without confession, or change of life. If we do not remove the cause of the scourge, how can we expect to be delivered from the scourge itself : “*Nec amputamus causas morbi ut morbus auferatur.*”—St. Jerome. We continue to irritate God, and then wonder that God should continue to chastise us. “Impure as we are,” says Salvian, “we wonder why we should be so miserable.” Do we think that God is appeased by the mere circumstance of our appearing at church, without repenting of our sins, without restoring the property, or character, of our neighbour, without flying those occasions of sin which keep us at a distance from God. Ah, let us not mock the Lord ! “And now do not mock, lest your bonds be tied strait.”—Isa. xxviii. 22. Do not mock God, says the prophet, lest those bonds which are securing you for hell, be tied strait. Cornelius a Lapide, in commenting on the above passage of Isaiah says, that when the fox is caught in the snare, its efforts to disengage itself only serve to entangle it the more : “*Impii illusores, irridendo Dei minas et pœnes, magis iisdem se adstringunt.*” My brethren, let us have done ; let us no more irritate God, the chastisement is near at hand : “For I have heard of the Lord the God of Hosts,” continues the prophet, “a consumption, and a cutting short upon all the

earth.”—Isa. xxviii. 22. I am not the prophet Isaiah, but I can say that I see the scourge which is hanging over us, if we do not be converted.

Hear how the Lord says to you : “ Who requires these things at your hands ? ”—Isa. i. 12. Who required your perpetual exercises and your visits of devotion to the church ? I will have nothing from you, unless you abandon sin ; “ offer sacrifice no more in vain.”—Ib. 13. Of what use are your devotions, if you do not amend your lives. “ My soul hateth your solemnities.”—Ib. 14. Know, says the Lord, that your homage and external devotions are hateful to my soul, whilst you think by these to avert your chastisement, without removing your offences ; “ with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted ; a sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit.”—Ps. l. 18, 19. No devotions, or alms, or penitential works, are accepted by God from a soul in the state of sin, and without repentance. God accepts the acts of him alone who is contrite for his sin, and resolved upon a change of life.

O, how God is not to be mocked ! I never commanded you, he says, to perform those devotions and acts of penance : “ For I spoke not to your Fathers concerning the matter of burnt offering and sacrifices, but this thing I commanded them, saying : hearken to my voice, and I will be

F

your God."—Jer. vii. 22. What I wish of you, says God, is, that you hear my voice and change your life, and make a good confession, with real sorrow, for you must know yourselves, that your other confessions, followed by so many relapses, have been worth nothing. I wish that you should do violence to yourselves in breaking with that connexion, with that company. I wish that you should endeavour to restore that property, to make good to your neighbour such a loss.—"Hearken to my voice," obey my command, "and I will be your God." I will then be to you the God of mercy, such as you would have me to be. Cardinal Ugon, in his comment upon these words of our Lord, in the gospel according to St. Matthew : "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."—Matt. xi. 15. says, "*alii habent aures sed non aures audiendi.*" Some have ears, but ears which do not serve them for hearing. How many attend sermons and receive admonitions from the confessor, in which they are told all that they must do in order to please God ; but they leave the church only to live worse than before. How can God be appeased by such ? or how can such be delivered from the divine chastisement ? "Offer up the sacrifice of justice, and trust in the Lord," Ps. iv. 6. says David. Honour God not in appearance, but by works. It is that which is meant by "the sacrifice of justice," honour him

by bewailing your sins, by the frequentation of the sacraments, by a change of life, and then hope in the Lord ; but to hope while you continue the state of sin, is not hope, it is rashness, it is a deceit of the enemy, and renders you more odious in the sight of God, and more deserving of punishment.

My brethren, you see that the Lord is in wrath, that he already has his hand lifted to strike with the scourge which threatens us ; how do you think to escape ? “ Who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come ? ”—Matt. iii. 7. “ Bring forth, therefore, fruit worthy of penance,” Ibid. 8. says the Baptist, preaching to the Jews of his day. You must do penance, but penance deserving of his pardon, that is, it must be true and resolute. Your anger must be changed into meekness, by the forgiveness of those who offend you ; your intemperance must become abstinence, by observing the fasts *commanded*, at least, by the Church, and by abstaining from the immoderate use of intoxicating drinks which change man into a beast, therefore you must avoid the public house ; impurity must give way in you to chastity, by your not returning to that filthy vomit, by resisting evil thoughts, by not using bad words, by flying bad companions, and dangerous conversation. “ You must bring forth fruit worthy of penance,” and the bringing forth of

such fruit, implies also that we attend to the service of God, and endeavour to serve him more than we offended him ; “ for, as you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity so now yield your members to love justice.” —Rom. vi. 19. Thus have done a St. Mary Magdalen, a St. Austin, a St. Mary of Egypt, a St. Margaret of Crotona, who by their works of penance and sanctification, rendered themselves more dear to God than others who had been less sinful, but more tepid. St. Gregory says, that “ for the most part, a fervent life after sin is the more pleasing to God, than a life which, though innocent, is tepid.” And thus does the Saint explain the following passage of the gospel : “ There shall be joy in Heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance.”—Luke xv. 7. This is understood of the sinner who after having arisen from sin, sets about serving God with more fervour than others who have long been just.

This is to bring forth fruit worthy of penance, not content one's self with hearing sermons and visiting the church, without abandoning sin, or flying the occasion of it. To act thus, is rather a mockery of God, and calculated to excite him to greater wrath. “ And, think not,” pursues the Baptist, “ think not to say within yourselves, we

have Abraham for our father.”—Matt. iii. 9. It will not do to say, we have the mother of God to assist us, we have our patron saint to procure us deliverance ; because, if we do not abandon our sins, the saints cannot help us. The saints are the friends of God, whence they not only have no inclination, but they should even feel ashamed to succour the obstinate. Let us tremble, because the Lord has already published the sentence, “that every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire.”—Matt. vii. 19. Brother, how many years have you been in the world ? Tell me what fruit of good works have you hitherto borne, what honour have you rendered to God by your life ? Sin, outrage, contempt, such are the fruit you have borne, the honour you have rendered to God.—God now in his mercy gives you time for penance, in order that you may bewail the injuries you have done him, and love him, the remainder of your days. What do you intend to do ? What have you resolved upon ? Resolve at once to give yourself to God. What do you expect ? unless that if you do not at once turn to God, you shall be cut down and cast into the fire of hell. But let us now bring our instruction to a conclusion ; the Lord has sent me to preach here to-day, and has inspired you to come and listen to me, because he wishes to spare you the punish-

ment which threatens you, if you do really turn to him ; “ leave not out one word, if so be, they will hearken and be converted, every one from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil which I think to do unto them.”—Jer. xxvi. 2, 3. The Lord has desired me to tell you on his part, that he is willing to relent, and withdraw the scourge which he meant to inflict upon you : “ That I may repent me of the evil which I think to do unto them ;” but on this condition, “ if so be, they will hearken and be converted every one from his evil way,” if they truly reform, otherwise he will put his threat in execution.—Tremble then if you be not yet resolved to change your life. But on the other hand, be joyful if you mean to turn in good earnest to God. “ Let the heard of them rejoice that seek the Lord,” Ps. civ. 3. because God is all tenderness and love to those that seek him. “ The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh him.”—Lam. iii. 25. Neither does the Lord know how to reject a heart humble and contrite for its offences. “ A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”—Ps. l. 19. Let us be joyful then, if we have the good intention of changing our lives, and if on seeing ourselves guilty of so many sins before the Lord, we stand very much in fear of the divine judgments, let us have recourse to the mother of mercies, the most holy Mary, who

defends and secures from the divine vengeance all those who take refuge under her mantle.—
“I am the citadel of all those who fly to me,”
thus is she made to speak by St. John Damascene.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE SIXTH.

God chastises us in this life for our good, not for our destruction.

“Non enim delectaris in perditionibus nostris.”

“For thou art not delighted in our being lost.”—*Job. iii. 22.*

LET us feel persuaded, my brethren, that there is no one who loves us more than God. St. Theresa says, that God loves us more than we love ourselves. He has loved us from eternity. “Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love.”—*Jer. xxxi. 3.* It is the love he has borne us which has drawn us from nothing, and given us being. “Therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.”—*Ibid.* Hence, when God chastises us upon the earth, it is not because he wishes to injure us, but because he wishes us well and loves us. “But, of this every one is sure that worshippeth thee, that his life, if it be under trial shall be crowned : and if it be under tribulation shall be delivered.”—*Job. iii. 21.* So spoke Sara the wife of Tobias ; Lord, he who serves thee is sure that after the trial shall have passed he shall be crowned, and that after tribulation he shall be spared the punishment which he de-

served ; “ for thou art not delighted in our being lost : because after a storm thou makest a calm, and after tears and weeping, thou pourest in joyfulness.”—Ibid. 21, 22. After the tempest of chastisement he gives us peace, and after mourning, joy and gladness. My brethren, let us convince ourselves of what I have undertaken to show you to-day, namely, that God does not afflict us in this life for our injury but for our good, in order that we may cease from sin, and by recovering his grace escape eternal punishment. “ And I will give my fear in their heart, that they may not revolt from me.”—Jer. xxxii. 40. The Lord says, that he infuses his fear into our hearts, in order that he may enable us to triumph over our passion for earthly pleasures, for which ungrateful that we are, we have left him. And when sinners have left him, how does he make them look into themselves, and recover his grace ? By putting on the appearance of anger, and chastising them in this life : “ In thy anger thou shalt break the people in pieces.” Another version according to St. Austin has : “ In thy wrath thou shalt conduct the people.” The saint enquiring, what is the meaning of his conducting the people in his wrath ! he then replies : “ You, O Lord ! fill us with tribulations, in order that being thus afflicted, we may abandon our sins and return to you.”

When the mother wishes to wean her infant how does she proceed? She puts bitters upon her breast. Thus the Lord endeavours to draw our souls to himself, and wean them from the pleasures of this earth, which make them live in forgetfulness of their eternal salvation; he fills with bitterness all their pleasures, pomps and possessions, in order, that not finding peace in those things they may turn to God, who alone can satisfy them. "In their affliction they will rise early to me."—Osee. vi. 1. God says within himself, if I allow those sinners to enjoy their pleasures undisturbed, they will remain in the sleep of sin: they must be afflicted, in order that recovering from their lethargy they may return to me. When they shall be in tribulation they will say: "Come, let us return to the Lord, for he hath taken us, and he will heal us: he will strike and he will cure us."—Osee. vi. 1, 2. What shall become of us, say those sinners, as they enter into themselves, if we do not turn from our evil courses? God will not be appeased, and will with justice continue to punish us, come on, let us retrace our steps; for he will cure us, and if he has afflicted us just now, he will upon our return think of consoling us with his mercy.

"In the day of my trouble I sought God and I was not deceived :"—Ps. lxxiv. 3, because

he raised me up. For this reason does the prophet thank the Lord, that he hath humbled him after his sin ; because he was thus taught to observe the divine laws : “ It is good for me, that thou hast humbled me, that I may learn thy justifications.”—Ps. cxviii. 71. Tribulation is for the sinner, at once a punishment and a grace, says St. Austin : “ *Pœna est, et gratia est.*” It is a punishment in as much as it has been drawn down upon him by his sins ; but it is a grace, and an important grace, in as much as it may ward eternal destruction from him, and is an assurance that God means to deal mercifully with him, if he look into himself, and receive with thankfulness that tribulation which has opened his eyes to his miserable condition, and invites him to return to God. Let us then be converted, my brethren, and we shall escape from our several chastisements : “ *Quid servat post pœnam,*” says St. Austin, “ *qui per gratiam exhibet pœnam.*” He who turns to God, smarting from the scourge has no longer anything to fear ; because God scourges only in order that we may return to him, and this end once obtained, the Lord will scourge no more.

St. Bernard says, that is impossible to pass from the pleasures of the earth to those of Paradise : “ *Difficile est, imo impossibile, ut præsenti-bus quis fruatur bonis et futuris : ut de deliciis*

transeat ad delicias :”—De inter. Dom. chap. 45. Therefore does the Lord say, “ Envy not the man who prospereth in his way, the man who doth unjust things.”—Ps. xxxvi. 7. “ Does he prosper ?” says St. Austin, “ ay but ‘ in his own way,’ and do you suffer ? You do, but it is in the way of God.” You who walk before God are in tribulation, but he, evil as is his way, prospers. Mark now, what the saint says in conclusion : “ He has prosperity in this life, he shall be miserable in the next ; you have tribulation in this life, you shall be happy in the next.” Be glad, therefore, O sinners ! and thank God when he punishes you in this life, and takes vengeance of your sins ; because you may know thereby, that he means to treat you with mercy in the next. “ Thou wast a merciful God to them, and taking vengeance on their inventions.”—Ps. xcvi. 8. The Lord when he chastises us, has not chastisement so much in view as our conversion. God said to Nabuchodonozor : “ Thou shalt eat grass like an ox, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.”—Dan. iv. 29. For seven years, Nabuchodonozor, shalt thou be compelled to feed upon grass like a beast, in order that you may know I am the Lord ; that it is I, who give kingdoms, and take them away ; and that you may thus be cured of your

pride. And in fact, this judgment, did cause the haughty king to enter into himself and change ; so that, after having been restored to his former condition, he said : “ Therefore I, Nabuchodonor, do now, praise and magnify the King of Heaven.”—Ibid. 34. And, God gave him back his kingdom. “ *Libenter commutavit sententiam,*” says St. Jerome : “ *quia vidit opera commutata.*”

Unhappy we, says the same saint, when God does not punish us in this life ! It is a sign, that he means us for eternal chastisements. “ *Magua est ira Dei quando non nobis irascitur ; reservat nos sicut vitulum in occisione.*”—Hier. in cit. Psal. 36. What do we conclude, he continues, when the surgeon sees the flesh about to mortify, and does not cut it away ? we conclude, that he abandons the patient to death ? God spares the sinner in this life, says St. Gregory, only to chastise us in the next : “ *Parcit ut in perpetuum feriat.*”—Mor. lib. 8. cap. 9. Woe to those sinners, to whom God has ceased to speak, and appears not to be in anger. “ I will cease and be angry no more.”—Ezeck. xvi. 42. The Lord then, goes on to say : “ But, thou hast provoked me in all these things : and thou shalt know, that I am the Lord, that thou mayest remember, and be confounded.”—Ibid. 43, 62, 63. A day will come, he says, un-

grateful sinner, when you shall know what I am, then shall you remember the graces I have given you ; and see with confusion, your black ingratitude. Woe to the sinner, who goes on in his evil life, and whom God in his vengeance suffers to accomplish his perverse desires, according to what is said by the prophet : " Israel hearkened not to me, so I let them go according to the desires of their heart."—Ps. lxxx. 12, 13. It is a sign, that the Lord wishes to reward them on this earth, for whatever little good they may have done, and reserves the chastisement of their sins for eternity : speaking of the sinner whom he treats thus in this life, the Lord says : " Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn justice and he shall not see the glory of the Lord."—Isa. xxvi. 10. Thus, does the poor sinner hasten on to his ruin, because seeing himself prosperous, he deceives himself into the expectation, that as God is dealing mercifully with him now, he will continue to do the same ; and by this delusion, he will be led to live on in his sins. But, will the Lord, be always thus merciful to him ? No, the day of punishment will come at length, when he shall be excluded from paradise, and flung into the dungeon of the rebels ; " and he shall not see the glory of the Lord." " Let us have pity on the wicked," far from me, says St. Jerome, be this mercy : " Longe

a me misericordia tam rigorosa," Lord, he says, extend not to me this dreadful pity ; if I have offended you, let me be chastised for it in this life ; because, if you do not chastise me here in this life, I shall have to be chastised in the other world, for all eternity. For this reason, did St. Austin say : " Lord, here cut, here burn, that you may spare during eternity ;" chastise me here, O God, and do not spare me now, in order, that I may be spared the punishment of hell. " Domine hic seca, hic non parcas, ut in æternum parcas." When the surgeon cuts the imposthume of the patient, it is a sign that he means to have him healed. St. Austin says : " it is most merciful of the Lord, not to suffer iniquity to pass unpunished." The Lord deals very mercifully with the sinner, when by chastisement he makes him enter into himself in this life. Hence Job, besought the Lord so earnestly to afflict him. " And, that this may be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow he spare not."—Job. vi. 10.

Jonas slept in the ship when he was flying from the Lord ; but God seeing that the wretched man was on the brink of temporal and eternal death, caused him to be warned of the tempest : " Why art thou fast asleep, rise up, call upon thy God."—Jon. i. 6. God, my brethren, now warns ye in like manner. You have been in the

state of sin, deprived of sanctifying grace, the chastisement has come, and that chastisement is the voice of God, saying to you, "why are you fast asleep? rise and call upon your God." Awake, sinner! do not live on forgetful of your soul and of God. Open your eyes, and see how you stand upon the verge of hell, where so many wretches are now bewailing sins less grievous than yours, and are you asleep? have you no thought of confession? no thought of rescuing yourself from eternal death? "Rise, call upon your God." Up from that infernal pit into which you have fallen; pray to God to pardon you, beg of him this at least, if you are not at once resolved to change your life, that he will give you light, and make you see the wretched state in which you stand. Learn how to profit by the warning which the Lord vouchsafes you. Jeremias first sees a rod. "I see a rod watching;" he next sees a boiling caldron: "I see a boiling caldron."—Jer. i. 12, 13. Saint Ambrose, in speaking of this passage, explains it thus: he who is not corrected by the rod, shall be thrown into the caldron, there to burn: "*Qui virgâ non corrigitur in olla mittitur ut ardeat.*"—In psal. 38. He whom the temporal chastisement fails to convert, shall be sent to burn eternally in hell-fire. Sinful brother, listen to God who addresses himself to your heart, by this chastise-

ment, and calls on you to do penance. Tell me what answer do you make him ? The prodigal son, after having left his father, thought no more upon him, whilst he continued to live amid delights ; but when he saw himself reduced to that state of misery described in the gospel, poor, deserted, obliged to tend swine, and not allowed to fill himself with the food wherewith the swine were filled, then, he came to himself and said : “ How many hired servants in my father’s house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger ? ”—Luke xv. 17. “ I will arise and go to my father.”—Ibid. 18. And so he did, and was lovingly received by his father. Brother, you have to do in like manner. You see the unhappy life you have hitherto led, by living away from God ; a life full of thorns and bitterness ; a life which could not be otherwise, as being, without God, who alone can give content. You see how many servants of God who love him, lead a happy life, and enjoy continual peace, the peace of God, which, as the apostle says, surpasses all the pleasures of the senses. “ The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding.”—Phil. iv. 7. And, what are you doing ? Do you not feel that you suffer a hell in this life ? do you not know that you shall suffer one in the next ? Take courage, say with the prodigal : “ I will arise and go to my father.” I will arise from this

sleep of death—this state of damnation, and return to God. It is true, that I have sufficiently outraged him, by leaving him so much against his desire, but he is still my father. “I will arise and go to my father.” And when you shall go to that Father, what shall you say to him? Say what the prodigal said to his father: “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son.”—Ibid. 18, 19. Father, I acknowledge my error, I have done ill to leave you who have so much loved me; I see now, that I am no longer worthy to be called your son; receive me at least, as your servant; restore me at least, to your grace, and then chastise me as you please.

O happy you, if you say and do thus! the same will happen you which befel the prodigal son. The father, when he saw his son retracing his steps, and perceived that he had humbled himself for his fault, not only did not drive him off—not only received him into his house, but embraced and kissed him as his son; “and running to him, fell upon his neck and kissed him.”—Ibid. 20. He then clothed him with a precious garment, which represents the robe of grace; “Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him.”—Ibid. 22. And he, moreover, makes a great feast in the house, to commemorate the recovery of his son, whom he looked upon as

lost and dead ; “ let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead and is come to life again—was lost and is found.”—Ibid. 23, 24. Let us then be joyful, my brethren ; it is true, that God appears to be in wrath, but he is still our Father ; let us retrace our steps in penance, and he will be appeased and spare us. Behold Mary our Mother praying for us on the one hand, and on the other turned towards us, saying, “ In me is all hope of life and of virtue come over to me all.”—Eccl. xxiv. 25, 26. My children, does that Mother of Mercy say to us, my poor afflicted children, have recourse to me, and in me you shall find all hope ; my Son denies me nothing. “ Qui invenerit me inveniet vitam.” You were dead by sin ; come to me, find me, and you shall find life—the life of divine grace, which I shall recover for you by my intercession.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE SEVENTH.

*God chastises us in this life, only that he may show us
Mercy in the next.*

“Ego quos amo arguo et castigo.”

“Such as I love, I rebuke and chastise.”—*Apoc.* iii. 19.

WHEN the Lord had raised that great tempest which threatened to sink the ship in which Jonas was sailing, in punishment of his disobedience to the divine command, that he should preach to the Ninevites, every one in the vessel was watching and in great fear, praying each to his own God, with the exception of Jonas, who was asleep within the vessel ; “He fell into a deep sleep.”—*Jon.* i. 5. But, knowing that he was the cause of the tempest, he caused himself to be thrown into the sea, and was there swallowed by the whale. When Jonas found himself in the belly of that fish, and in such extreme danger of death, he addressed himself to God in prayer, and God delivered him ; “I cried out of my affliction to the Lord, and the Lord heard me.”—*Jon.* ii. 3. “Behold,” says St. Zeno, “how Jonas, who slumbered in the ship, is awake in the whale.” While in the ship, he slumbered in his sin ; but when suffering

chastisement, and upon the point of death, he opened his eyes and remembered God ; hence he had recourse to the divine mercy which delivered him, causing the fish to leave him safe and sound upon the shore. Many persons, before seeing the divine chastisements, sleep in their sins, forgetful of God ; but the Lord, because he does not desire their destruction, sends them afflictions, roused by which from their lethargy, they return to him, and thus he is enabled to avoid punishing them during all eternity. Such, then, is the subject of this discourse. God punishes us in this life, in order to spare us in the next.

We have not been created for this earth ; we have been created for the blessed kingdom of Paradise. For this reason it is, says St. Austin, that God mingles so much bitterness with the delights of the world, in order that we may not forget him and eternal life. "*Si cessaret Deus et non misceret amaritudines felicitatibus sæculi, oblivisceremur ejus.*" If, living as we do amid so many thorns in this life, we are strongly attached to it, and long so little after Paradise ; how little should we not value Paradise, if God were not to embitter continually the pleasures of this earth ? And if we have offended God, we must needs be punished for it, either in this world or in the next. St. Ambrose says that God

is merciful as well when he punishes, as when he does not ; “ *Quam pius quam clemens in utroque Deus cum miseretur aut vindicat.*”—*Lib. vi. in Luc.* The chastisements of God are the effect of his love ; they are, to be sure, punishments, but punishments which ward off from us eternal punishment, and bring us to everlasting happiness. “ But whilst we are judged, we are chastised by the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world.”—*1 Cor. xi. 32.* And Judith reminded the Hebrews of the same truth, when they were under the scourge of the Lord ; “ Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which like servants we are chastised, have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction.”—*Judith viii. 27.* Sarah, the wife of Tobias, says the same : “ But of this every one is sure that worshippeth thee if his life be under correction, it shall be allowed to come to thy mercy, for thou art not delighted in our being lost.”—*Tob. iii. 21, 22.* Lord, she said, you chastise us here, in order that you may spare us in the other life, for thou dost not desire our destruction.

We have it from God himself, that those whom he loves in this life he chastises, in order that they may be converted : “ Those whom I love, I rebuke and chastise.”—*Apoc. iii. 19.* Where God loves, says St. Basil of Selucia, severity is

usually the pledge of his graces: "*Ubi amor est, severitas solet esse pignus gratiarum.*" Unhappy are the sinners who living in the state of sin, prosper in this life; it is a sign that God reserves them for everlasting punishment. "The sinner hath provoked the Lord, according to the multitude of his wrath, he will not seek him."—Ps. x. 4. Behold! says St. Austin, speaking of the passage quoted, behold the most grievous chastisement! "*Non quæret, multum irascitur dum non requiret.*" When he does not appear to take notice of the sinner, and leaves him unpunished, it is a sign that he is very wroth. I call you, says God to him whom he chastises, and will you be deaf to my voice? Son, be converted, otherwise you shall confirm my anger, since I shall cease to regard your salvation, and allow you to live on in your sins without punishment, but only that I may punish you in the life to come. "And my indignation shall rest in thee; and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will cease and be angry no more."—Ezech. xvi. 42. The apostle warns you, my brethren, not to be deaf to the voice of God, for that on the day of judgment your obstinacy shall be rewarded with a dreadful chastisement, and that chastisement eternal. "But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation

of the just judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works."—Rom. ii. 5, 6.

So that, St. Jerome says, that there cannot be a greater punishment for a sinner, than that he should not be punished in this life : "*Magna ira quando peccantibus non irascitur Deus.*" And Saint Isidore Pelusiota says, that sinners who are punished in this life, do not deserve pity, but those only who die without having been punished : "*Delinquentes et in hac vitâ castigati non deplorandi sunt, sed qui impuniti abeunt.*"—Lib. v. epist. 269. It is not so bad, continues the Saint, to be simply sick, as to have no one to cure you : "*Non tam molestum ægrotare, quam morbo medelam non afferri.*" St. Austin says, in another part, that when God does not chastise the sinner in this world, he chastises him most severely ; whence, he concludes, that there is no greater misfortune than impunity for a sinner : "*Si impunita dimittit Deus tunc punit infestius ; quoniam nihil est infelicius felicitate peccatorum.*"—Epist. v. ad Marcell. After England had rebelled against the church, God did not visit her with temporal scourges, her riches have been increasing from that time ; but her chastisement is all the greater on that account ; as she is left to perish in her sin. "*Nihil infelicius felicitate peccantium.*" The absence of punishment, is the

greatest punishment, says the same holy doctor, "Nulla pœna magna pœna."—Serm. 37. De verb. Dom. The not receiving chastisement in this life for sin, is a great chastisement, and prosperity in sin a still greater.

"Why then," Job enquires, "do the wicked live, are they advanced and strengthened with riches?"—Job xxi. 7. How comes it, O Lord, that sinners, instead of being taken out of this life in poverty and tribulation, enjoy health, and honours, and riches? The holy man answers, "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell."—Ibid. 13. Wretched men ! they enjoy their riches for a few days, and when the hour of chastisement comes, when they least expect it, they are condemned to burn for ever in that place of torments. Jeremiah makes the self same enquiry : "Why doth the way of the wicked prosper?"—Jer. xii. 1. and then adds, "gather them together, as sheep for a sacrifice."—Ibid. 3. Animals destined for sacrifice, are kept from all labour, and fattened up for slaughter. Thus does God act towards the obstinate, he abandons them, and suffers them to fatten on the pleasures of this life, in order to sacrifice them in the other to his eternal justice ; for these, says Minutius Felix, are fed like victims for the slaughter. "Hi enim ut victimæ ad supplicium saginantur." These wretched men, says

David, shall not be punished in this life, they shall enjoy their fleeting pleasures ; by and by their dream shall have ceased : “ neither shall they be scourged like other men, they have suddenly ceased to be ; as the dream of them that awake, O Lord, so in thy city thou shalt bring their image to nothing.”—Ps. lxxii. 5, 19, 20. How painful is not the case of a poor man, who dreams that he has grown rich or great, and upon awaking finds himself the miserable and sick creature he is ? “ And the enemies of the Lord shall vanish like smoke.”—Ps. xxxvi. 20. The happiness of sinners is as suddenly dissipated, as is smoke by a breath of air. “ Smoke,” observes St. Gregory, in his comment upon this passage, “ vanishes in its ascent.” And the same is the case with sinners : “ I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and I passed by, and lo ! he was not.”—Ps. xxxvi. 35, 36. Minutius Felix says, in his comment upon the place cited, the unhappy men are exalted the higher, that their fall may be the greater : “ *Miseri Altius extolluntur ut profundius decident.*” The Lord allows the sinner to be exalted for his greater punishment, in order that his fall may be the more grievous, as is said by David, “ When they were lifted up thou hast cast them down.”—Ps. lxxii. 18. If the sick man, says St. Chrysostom, suffer hunger or thirst by order of his physician,

it is a sign that the physician has hopes of him ; but if the doctor allow him to eat what he pleases, and drink as much as he likes, what are we to conclude from that ? It is plain that the physician has given him over. And thus, says St. Gregory, it is a manifest sign that God abandons the sinner to perdition, when he never thwarts his evil purposes : “ *Manifestum perditionis indicium quando nulla contrarietas impedit quod mens perversa concepit :*” and in the book of proverbs we read, that “the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” As lightning precedes thunder, says St. Bernard, so is prosperity the forerunner of damnation for the sinner : “ *Sicut fulgur tonitrum portat ita prosperitas supplicia sempiterna.*”—*Serm. in fer. v. Dom. ii. Quadrag.* The greatest punishment inflicted by God is, when he allows the sinner to sleep on in sin, without rousing him from that sleep of death in which he is buried : “I will make them drunk, that they may sleep an everlasting sleep, and awake no more, saith the Lord.”—*Jerem. li. 39.* Cain, after the crime of murdering his brother, was afraid that he should be killed by the first person he should meet : “ *Omnis qui invenerit me, occidet me.*”—*Gen. iv. 14 ;* but the Lord assured him that he should live, and that no one should kill him, which assurance of a long life, according to St. Ambrose, was Cain’s greatest punish-

ment : “ *Longæva vita vindicta est ; favor enim impiorum est si subito moriantur.*”—*Lib. ii. de Abil. cap. 9.* The saint says, that God treats the obstinate sinner mercifully, when he gives him an early death, because he thus saves him from as many hells, as he should have committed sins, during a longer life. Let sinners then, live according to the desires of their hearts, let them enjoy their pleasures in peace, there will at length come a time when they shall be caught as fish upon the hook. “As fishes are taken with the hook so men are taken in the evil time.”—*Ecclesiastes ix. 12.* Whence, St. Austin says, “Do not rejoice like the fish who is delighted with the bait, for the fisherman has not yet pulled the hook.” If you were to see a condemned man, making merry at a banquet, with the halter round his neck, and every moment awaiting the order for execution, which would you envy or pity him? Neither should you envy the sinner who is happy in his vices. “*Nondum traxit hamum piscator.*” That wretched sinner is already on the hook, he is already in the infernal net ; when the time of chastisement shall have arrived, then the wretch will know and deplore his damnation, but all to no purpose.

On the contrary, it is a good sign when a sinner is chastised and suffers tribulation in this life, it is a sign that God has still merciful views

upon him ; and that he wishes to substitute a temporal for an eternal punishment in his regard. God, says St. Chrysostom, when he punishes us on this earth, does not do so out of hatred to us, but that he may draw us to himself. "*Cum irascitur non odio hoc facit, sed ut ad se attrahat quos non vult perire.*"—In Matt. iv. hom. 14. He chastises for a little while, that he may have you with him for eternity. "*Aversatur ad tempus ut te secum habet in æternum.*" When the physician uses the knife, he does so to cure, says St. Austin : "*Medici percutiunt et sanant.*" And God, the saint continues, does the same in our regard. "*Sævire videtur Deus, ne metuas ; Pater est, nunquam enim sævit ut perdat.*" But, does not God say the same himself ? "Those whom I love, I rebuke and chastise, be zealous therefore, and do penance."—Apoc. iii. 19. Son, says God, I love you, and therefore I chastise you ; "be zealous," see how good I am to you, endeavour you to act in like manner towards me ; do penance for your sins, if you wish that I should spare you the chastisement which you deserve : at least, accept with patience, and turn to advantage the tribulation which I send you. In this cross, which now afflicts you, hear you my voice calling upon you to turn to me, and fly from hell which is close upon you. "Behold ! I stand at the gate and knock ;"

I am knocking at the door of your heart; open then to me, and know that when the sinner who has driven me from his heart, shall open the door again to me, I will enter, and keep him company for ever." If any man shall hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me."—Apoc. iii. 20. I shall remain united to him for ever on this earth; and if he remain faithful, I shall seat him beside me, on the throne of my eternal kingdom. "To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with me in my throne."—Apoc. iii. 21.

What, must we look upon God as a tyrant, who should take pleasure in our sufferings? He does take pleasure in punishing us, but exactly the same pleasure as a father takes in correcting his son, he does not take pleasure in the pain which he inflicts, but in the amendment it will work. "My son, reject not the correction of the Lord; and do not faint when thou art chastised by him, for whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and as a father in the son, he pleaseth himself."—Prov. iii. 11, 12. He chastises you, because he loves you, it is not that he wishes to see you afflicted but converted; and if he takes pleasure in your suffering, he does so in as much, as it is an instrument of conversion, just as a father who chastises his son, derives pleasure, not from the affliction of his son, but from

the amendment which he hopes to see in him, and which will prevent him from working his own ruin. Chastisement, makes us return to God, says St. Chrysostom : " *Pœnæ nos ad Deum perducunt ;*" and it is to this end God inflicts it, in order that we may not stay away from him.

Why then, my brethren, do you complain of God when in tribulation ? You ought to thank him prostrate on the earth ; tell me now, if a man condemned to die, were to have his sentence changed by the prince from death into one hour's imprisonment, and if he were to complain of that one hour, would his complaint be justifiable ? Oh, would he not rather deserve, that the prince should reverse the last sentence, and condemn him a second time to death ? You have long and often deserved hell by your sins. And do you know all that the word hell conveys ? Know, that it is more dreadful to suffer for one moment in hell, than to suffer for an hundred years the most frightful torments which the martyrs have suffered on earth ; and in this hell, you should have had to suffer during all eternity. And yet, you complain if God send you some tribulation, some infirmity, some loss. Thank God, and say : Lord, this chastisement is trifling compared with my sins. I ought to have been in hell burning, deserted by all, and in despair :

I thank you for having called me to yourself by this tribulation which you have sent me. God, says Oleastro, often calls sinners to repentance by temporal chastisements : “ *Pæna est modus loquendi Dei quo culpam ostendit.*” By earthly chastisements the Lord shows us the immense punishment which our sins deserve ; and therefore, afflicts us on this earth, that we may be converted and escape eternal flames. Wretched then, as we have been, wretched indeed is that sinner, who is left unpunished in this life, but still more wretched he, who admonished by affliction, does not amend. “ *Non est grave,*” says St. Basil, “ *plagâ affici sed plagâ meliorum non affici.*” It is not a grievous thing to be afflicted by God, on this earth, after one has sinned ; but it is very grievous not to be converted by the affliction sent, and to be like those of whom David speaks, who although visited by the divine chastisement, still sleep on in their sins. “ *At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, they have all slumbered.*”—Ps. lxxv. 7. As if the sound of the scourges, and the thunders of God, instead of rousing them from their lethargy, served only to make them sleep more soundly. “ *I struck you, yet you returned not to me.*”—Amos. iv. 9. I have scourged you says God, in order that you might return to me ; but ye, ungrateful that you are, have been deaf to my calls. Unhappy the

sinner, who acts like him, of whom the Lord says, "he shall send lightnings against him his heart shall be as hard as a stone, and as firm as a smith's anvil."—Job. xli. 14, 15. God visits him with chastisement, and he, instead of being softened, and returning to the Lord by penance, shall be "as firm as a smith's anvil," he shall grow more hardened under the blows of God, as the anvil grows continually harder under the hammer of the smith ; and shall become like the impious Achaz, of whom the scripture says, "in the time of his distress, he increased contempt against the Lord."—Parall. xxviii. 22. Unhappy man, instead of humbling himself, he the more despised the Lord.

Do you know what more happens to these rash beings ? They begin to suffer hell, even in this life. "He shall rain snares upon the sinners ; fire and brimstone, and storms of wind shall be the portion of their cup."—Ps. x. 7. The Lord shall rain upon them his chastisement, sickness, misery, and every bitterness ; but this is not the entire, it is only a portion of their cup, that is, of their chastisement. "The Lord says, 'the portion' only of their cup ;" observes St. Gregory, "because their suffering begins here indeed ; but shall be continued throughout eternity." He deserves all this, who being afflicted by the Lord for his conversion, continues to earn

H

chastisement, and provoke the Lord to greater wrath. "In flagellis positum," says St. Austin : "flagellis digna committere, est scævientem acrius ad iracundum concitare." What can I do, O sinner ! to work your conversion ? will the Lord then say. I have called you by sermons, and inspirations, and you have despised them, I have called you by favours, and you have grown more insolent, I have called you by scourges, and you continue to offend me. "For what shall I strike you any more, you that increase transgression and the daughter of Sion shall be left as a city that is laid waste."—Isa. i. 5, 8. Do you not wish to hearken even to my chastisements ? Do you wish that I should abandon you ? I shall be obliged to do it if you do not amend.

My brethren, let us no longer abuse the mercy which God uses towards us. Let not be like the nettle, which stings him who strikes it. God afflicts us, because he loves us, and wishes to see us reformed : "Optima consideratio," says Oleastro, "cum senseris pœnam, culpæ memenis." When we feel the chastisement, we should bethink us of our sins, and say with the brethren of Joseph, "we deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother."—Gen. xlvii. 21. Lord, you punish us justly, because we have offended you, our father

and God. "Thou art just, O God ! and thy judgment is right."—Ps. cxviii. 137, "everything thou hast done to us, thou hast done in true judgment."—Dan. iii. 31. Lord, thou art just, and dost with justice punish us, we accept this tribulation which you send us, give us strength to suffer it with patience. And here we should do well to remember, what God once said to a nun : "You have sinned, you must do penance, you must pray."—Disingan. de Teres. Parola. iii. sec. vi. Some sinners are satisfied, with recommending themselves to the servants of God, but they must moreover pray and do penance. Let us do so, because when the Lord shall see our resignation, he will not only forgive our sins, but even remit the chastisement ; and if God continues to afflict us, let us have recourse to that Lady, who is called the consolatrix of the afflicted. All the saints compassionate us in our sufferings, but there is not of them, as St. Antoninus says, who feels so much for us as this divine mother Mary : "Non reperitur aliquis sanctorum ita nobis compati in infirmitatibus sicut mulier hæc B. Virgo Maria." And Richard of St. Lorenzo adds, that this mother of mercy cannot behold unhappy sufferers, without succouring them. "Non potest miserias scire et non subvenire."

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE EIGHTH.

Prayers appease God, and avert from us the chastisement we deserve, provided we purpose to amend.

“Petite et accipietis, quærite et invenietis.”

“Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find.”

John xvi. 24.

HE who has a good heart, cannot but feel compassion for the afflicted, and wish to see all men happy. But, who has a heart as good as the Lord's? He by his nature is infinite goodness, whence it is, that God by his nature has an extreme desire to deliver us from every evil, and render us happy in all things, nay, even partakers of his own happiness. He wishes, therefore, that for our greater good, we beg of him the graces which we stand in need of, that we may be spared the chastisement which we deserve, and arrive at life everlasting. Hence, he has promised to hear the prayers of him who prays to him, with hope in his goodness. “Petite et accipietis.” But, to come at once to the subject of our discourse : God is appeased by prayers, and led to withdraw the chastisement which we deserve, provided we purpose to amend.

God wishes that we should all be saved, as the apostle assures us, God, "who will have all men to be saved."—1 Tim. ii. 4. And, although he sees so many sinners who deserve hell, he does not wish that any of them should be lost, but that they should be restored to his grace by penance, and be saved. "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance."—2 Peter iii. 9. But before delivering us from the punishment we have deserved, and dispensing his graces, he wishes to be sought in prayer. "By prayer," says St. Laurence Justinian, "the wrath of God is suspended, his vengeance is delayed, and pardon finally procured." O how great are not the promises which God makes to him who prays. "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee," xlix. 15. "cry to me, and I will hear thee."—Jer. xxxiii. 3. "You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you."—John xv. 7. Theodoret says, that prayer is one only instrument, but that it can effect all things: "*Oratio cum sit una, omnia potest.*" And let us bear in mind, my brethren, that when we pray and ask things conducive to salvation, not even our sins can prevent our receiving the graces which we beg.—"For, every one that asketh receiveth."—Matt. vii. 8. Jesus Christ here says, that whoever asks, be he just or in sin, shall receive. Where-

fore, did David say, "For thou, O Lord, art sweet, and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee."—Ps. lxxxv. 5. Hence, the Apostle St. James, in order to excite us to prayer, tells us : "But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not."—James i. 5. When God is solicited, he gives more than is asked of him, he "giveth to all men abundantly. When one man asks a favour of another whom he may have formerly injured, the latter usually reproaches him with the injury that had been done him ; but not so God, he never "upbraideth." When we beg of him some grace for the good of our souls, he never reproaches us with the offences which we have committed against him ; but he hears us, and consoles us as though we had always served him faithfully. "Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name," said the Lord one day to his disciples, and to-day he says the same thing to us : "Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."—John xvi. 24. As if he were to say, why do you complain of me ? You have only yourselves to blame—you have not asked graces of me, and therefore you have not received them. Ask of me, henceforward, what you please, and it shall be granted you ; and if you have not merit sufficient to obtain it, ask it of my Father in my

name; that is, through my merits, and whatever it be, I promise you that you shall obtain it. "Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you."—John xvi. 23. The princes of the earth, says St. John Chrysostom, give audience only to a few, and that seldom; but access can always be had to God by every one, at all times, and with certainty of a favourable hearing. "*Aures principis paucis patent, Dei vero omnibus volentibus.*" Rely, then, upon these great promises, so often repeated by the Lord in the Scriptures; and let us ever be attentive to beg of him those graces which are necessary for salvation, namely, the pardon of our sins, perseverance in his grace, his holy love, resignation to his divine will, a happy death, and Paradise. By prayer, we shall attain all; without prayer, we shall have nothing. What the Holy Fathers and theologians commonly say, namely, that prayer is necessary to adults, as a means of salvation, comes to this, that it is impossible for any one to be saved without prayer. Lessius wisely says, that it ought to be of faith, that without prayer salvation is impossible. "*Fide tenendum est orationem adultis ad salutem necessariam esse.*" And this is clearly to be drawn from the Scriptures, which say: "Ask, and you shall receive:" for, as he who seeks, obtains, says St. Theresa,

he who does not seek, does not obtain. "Pray, that ye enter not into temptation."—Matt. xxvi. 41. "We ought always to pray."—Luke xviii. The words "seek," and "pray," and "we ought," according to the opinions of most theologians, along with St. Thomas, imply a precept binding under pain of mortal sin. Let us pray, then, and pray with great confidence—confidence in what? In that divine promise by which God has made himself our debtor. "Promittendo debitorem se facit." He has promised; he cannot be wanting to his promise; let us seek and hope, and we must be saved. "No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded."—Eccl. ii. 11. There never has been, and never will be found any one to hope in the Lord, and be lost, as the prophet assures us: "he is the protector of all that trust in him." But how comes it then, that some persons ask graces, and do not obtain them? St. James answers that it is because they ask ill. "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss."—James iv. 3. You must not only ask and hope, but ask and hope as you ought, which brings us to the second point.

God has all the desire to deliver us from every evil, and to share his blessings with us, as I said in the beginning, but he wishes to be sought in prayer, and prayed to as he should, in order that

we should be heard. How can God think of hearing that sinner who prays to him that he may be freed from his afflictions, whilst he is unwilling to abandon sin, which is the cause of his afflictions. When the impious Jeroboam stretched out his hand against the prophet, who reproached him with his wretchedness, the Lord caused his hand to wither up, so that he could not draw it back. "And his hand which he stretched forth against him withered, and he was not able to draw it back again to him."—3 Kings xiii. 4. Then the king turned to the man of God, and besought him to beg of the Lord to restore his hand to him. Theodoret says, with regard to this circumstance, "fool that he was to have asked the prophet's prayers for the restoration of his hand, and not for pardon of his sins." Thus do many act ; they beg of God to deliver them from their afflictions, they beg of the servants of God to avert by their prayers the threatened chastisements, but they do not seek to obtain the grace of abandoning their sins, and changing their lives. And, how can such persons hope to be freed from the chastisement, when they will not remove its cause. What is it arms the hand of the Lord with thunders to chastise and afflict us ? Oh, it is accursed sin ! "*census peccati pœna*," says Tertullian. The afflictions we suffer, are a fine which must be paid by him whom sin

has subjected to the penalty. St. Basil, in like manner says, that sin is a note of hand which we give against ourselves : “ *Est chirographum quoddam contra nos.*” Since we sin, we voluntarily go in debt to God’s justice. It is not God then, who makes us miserable, it is sin. Sin it is which obliges God to create chastisements, “ *famine, and affliction, and scourges, all things are created for the wicked.*”—*Ecc. xl. 9, 10.*

Jeremiah, addressing the divine vengeance, says, “ *O thou sword of the Lord, how long will thou not be quiet? Go into thy scabbard, rest and be still.*”—*Jerem. xlvii. 6.* But then, he goes on to say, “ *How shall it be quiet when the Lord hath given it a charge against Ascalon?*” How can the sword of the Lord ever be quiet, if sinners do not choose to abandon their sin, notwithstanding that the Lord has given a charge to his sword, to execute vengeance as long as sinners shall continue to deserve it. But some will say, we make novenas, we fast, we give alms, we pray to God, why are we not heard? To them the Lord replies, “ *When they fast, I will not hear their prayers, and when they offer holocausts and victims, I will not receive them, for I will consume them by the sword, and by famine, and by pestilence.*”—*Jer. xiv. 12.* How, exclaims the Lord! how can I hear the prayers of those who beg to be freed from their afflictions,

and not from their sins, because they do not wish to reform. What care I for their fasts, and their sacrifices, and their alms, when they will not change their lives. "I will consume them by the sword." With all their prayers, and devotions, and penitential exercises, I shall be obliged, by my justice, to punish them.

Let us not then, my brethren, trust to prayers or other devotions, unaccompanied by a resolution to amend. You pray, you smite your breast, and call for mercy, but that is not enough. The impious Antiochus prayed, but the scriptures say, that his prayers failed to obtain mercy from God. "Then this wicked man prayed to the Lord, of whom he was not to obtain mercy."—2 Mach. ix. 13. The unhappy man, finding himself devoured by worms, and near his end, prayed for life, but without having sorrow for his sins. Neither let us trust in our holy protectors, if we do not purpose to amend. Some say we have our patron, or some other saint who will defend us ; we have our mother, Mary, to procure our deliverance. "Who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come? and think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our Father."—Matt. iii. 7, 9. How can we think to escape punishment, if we do not abandon sin? How can the saints think of assisting us, if we persist in exasperating the Lord? St. Chrysostom says, of

what use was Jeremiah to the Jews? "*Quid profuit Jeremiah Judæis.*" The Jews had Jeremiah to pray for them, but, notwithstanding all the prayers of that holy prophet, they received the chastisement, because they did not wish to give up their sins. Beyond doubt, says the holy doctor, the prayers of the saints contribute much to obtain the divine mercy for us, but when? when we do penance: "*Prosunt plurimum, sed quando aliquid agimus.*" They are useful, but only when we do ourselves violence to abandon sin, to fly occasions, and return to God's favour. The emperor Foca, in order to defend himself from his enemies, raised walls and multiplied fortifications, but he heard a voice saying to him from heaven, "you build walls, but when the enemy is within, the city is easily taken." We must then expel this enemy, which is sin, from our souls, otherwise God cannot exempt us from chastisement because he is just, and cannot leave sin unpunished. Another time the citizens of Antioch prayed to Mary, to avert from them a scourge which overhung them; and whilst they were praying, St. Bertoldus heard the divine mother replying from heaven, "Abandon your sins, and I shall be propitious to you." Let us then beg of the Lord to use mercy towards us, but let us pray as David prayed: "Lord incline unto my aid." God wishes to aid us, but he wishes that we should

aid ourselves, by doing all that depends upon us. "He who desires to be assisted," says Ilatero, "must do all that he can to assist himself." God wishes to save us, but we must not imagine that God will do all without our doing anything. St. Austin says, "he who created you without your help, will not save you without your help." What do you expect sinful brother? That God will bring you to Paradise with all your sins upon you? Do you continue to draw down upon you the divine scourges, and yet hope to be delivered from them? Must God save you while you persist in damning yourself?

If we purpose truly to turn to God, then let us pray to him and rejoice; even though the sins of the entire world were ours, we should be heard as I said to you in the beginning. Every one who prays with a purpose of amendment, obtains mercy; "*Omnis qui petit accipit.*" Let our prayers be in the name of Jesus Christ, who has promised that the Eternal Father will grant us everything we ask in his name; that is, through his merits. "If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you." Let us pray, and never cease from prayer; thus we shall obtain every grace, and save ourselves. It is to this we are exhorted by St. Bernard, who tells us to pray to God through the intercession of Mary: "Let us seek grace, and seek it through

Mary ; because he who seeks through her, obtains his request, and cannot be disappointed."—
De. Aquæd. Mary, when she is prayed to by us, certainly pleads for us with her Son ; and when Mary prays for us, she obtains what she demands, and her prayer cannot be refused by a son who loves her so much.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE NINTH.

Most Holy Mary is the Mediatrix of Sinners.

“Ego murus et ubera mea sicut turris; ex quo factus sum coram eo quasi pacem reperiens.”

“I am a wall, and my breasts are as a tower, since I am become in his presence as one finding peace.”—*Cant.* viii. 10.

DIVINE grace is an infinite treasure, because it makes us friends of God. “For she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God.”—*Wisd.* vii. 14. Hence it follows, that if there cannot be a greater happiness than to enjoy the grace of God, there cannot be a greater misery than to incur his displeasure by sin, which makes us his enemies. “But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.”—*Wisd.* xiv. 9. But if, my brethren, any of you have had the misfortune to forfeit this divine grace by sin, do not despair, but console yourselves with the reflection, that you have in Jesus Christ himself a mediator, who can obtain pardon for you, and restore you the grace you have lost. “And he is the propitiation for our sins.”—1 John ii. 2. What have you to fear, says St. Bernard, when you can have recourse to so great a mediator?

He can do all things with his Eternal Father. "Jesum tibi dedit mediatorem; quid apud Patrem talis filius non obtineat?"—Serm. de aquæd. He has satisfied the divine justice for you, continues the holy abbot, and has nailed your sins to the cross, having taken them away from your soul. "Quid timetis modicæ fidei? peccata affixit cruce suis manibus." But if, notwithstanding all this, you fear to approach Jesus Christ on account of his divine majesty, God has given you another advocate with his Son, and that advocate is Mary. "Sed forsitan et in ipsam majestatem vereare divinam; advocatum habere vis apud ipsum? Recurre ad Mariam."

Thus Mary has been given to the world as a mediatrix between God and sinners. Hear the words which the Holy Ghost makes her speak in the divine canticles: "I am a wall, and my breasts are as a tower, since I am become in his presence as one finding peace." I am, she says, the refuge of those who fly to me; my breasts, that is my mercy, are like a tower of defence to every one who has recourse to me; and he who is the enemy of God, let him know that I am the mediatrix of peace between God and sinners. "Ipsa reperit pacem inimicis, vitam perditis salutem desperatis," says Cardinal Ugon. For this reason is Mary called, "beautiful as the curtains of Solomon."—Cant. i. 4. In the

tents of David naught was to be heard of but war ; in the tents of Solomon naught is spoken of but peace. By this we are to understand, that Mary has no other ministry in heaven than that of peace and pardon. Hence St. Andrew Avellino calls her the pleader of Paradise, but what are those occupations in which Mary is engaged ? “ Mary,” says the venerable Bede, “ stands in the presence of her son, praying unceasingly for sinners.” And the blessed Amadeo says, that “ Mary, all-powerful by her prayers, stands before the face of God, continually interceding for us ” Thus Mary never ceases to implore of God by her all-powerful prayers all graces for us, if we do not refuse them. And are there any found to refuse the graces solicited for them by this divine Mother ? Yes, there are found such—yes, those who will not abandon sin, who will not give up this friendship, this occasion ; who will not restore their neighbour’s property—those are they who will not receive the graces begged for them by Mary, because Mary wishes to obtain for them the grace of breaking off this connexion, of flying this occasion of weakness, and they will not do it. And such as will not do it, positively refuses the grace sought for them by Mary. She from heaven sees well all our miseries and dangers ; and oh, how deeply is she not touched with compassion for us ! With what motherly

affection is she not always endeavouring to assist us ! “ *Videt enim, nostra discrimina,*” continues the blessed Amadeo, “ *nostrique clemens Domina materno affectu miseretur.*”

One day St. Bridget heard Jesus Christ saying to Mary : “ Mother, ask of me what you will.” And Mary replying to him : “ I ask mercy for the unfortunate.”—Rev. lib. i. c. 46. As if she were to say to him, Son, since you have made me the Mother of Mercy, and Advocate of Sinners, can I ask aught else of you than mercy for the unhappy ? In a word, St. Austin says, that amongst all the saints, we have not one who is so solicitous for our salvation as Mary : “ *Unam ac te solam pro nobis in cœlo fatemur esse sollicitam.*”—Ap. S. Bon. in Specch. lec. vi.

Isaiah complains in his day as follows : “ Behold, thou art angry there is none who riseth up and taketh hold of thee.”—Isai. lxiv. 5, 7. Lord, said the prophet, you are justly angry with us for our sins, and there is no one to appease you, or draw you from chastising us. St. Bonaventure says, that the prophet had reason to speak thus, since there was no Mary then : “ *Ante Mariam non fuit qui sic Deum retinere auderet.*”—In spec cap. 12. But at present, if Jesus Christ wishes to chastise a sinner, and the sinner recommend himself to Mary, she by her prayers for him restrains her son, and averts the

chastisement from him. "Detinet filium ne percutiat," there is no one he says, so well able to hold back the sword of the Lord, "nemo tam idoneus qui Domini gladio manus objiciat." Justly, then, did St. Andrew call Mary the peace of the Lord with men: "Salve divina cum hominibus reconciliatio."—Orat. 2, de Ass. And St. Justin called her the "Arbitress," saying, "Verbum usum est virgine sequestrâ." "Sequestra" signifies an arbitress, to whose decision disputants bind themselves to yield. By which St. Justin means to say, that Jesus lays before Mary all his reasons for punishing such a sinner, that she may negotiate a peace; and the sinner, on the other side, places himself in her hands. Thus Mary, on the one side, obtains for the sinner the grace of amendment, and penance on the other; he obtains pardon for him of her son, and thus it is concluded. Such is the ministry in the exercise of which Mary is continually occupied.

When Noah judged that the deluge ought to have ceased, he dismissed the dove from the ark. She returned with a branch of olive, significant of the peace which God had concluded with the world. This dove was a figure of Mary. "Tu es illa," says St. Bonaventure, "fidelissima columba Noe, quæ inter Deum et mundum spirituali diluvio submersum mediatrix fidelissima extitisti."

You, O Mary ! are the dove all-faithful to him who invokes you—you are the dove who interceding with God, have obtained for us peace and salvation. “*Per te pax cœlestis donata est,*” says St. Epiphanius. The author of the *Pœmerium* enquires how it happens that in the Old Law, the Lord was so vigorous in his chastisements, of universal deluge, of fire from heaven, of fiery serpents, and such like punishments ; whereas, he now deals so mercifully with us, who have sinned more grievously than those of old ? “*Quare parcit nunc mundo ipse Deus qui olim multo his minora peccata gravius punivit ?*” And he answers, he does it all through love of Mary, who intercedes for us. “*Totum hoc facit propter beatam Virginem.*”—Ap. P. Pepe. Grand. etc. “O how long since should the earth have been destroyed !” says St. Fulgentius, “if Mary had not interposed.” Wherefore the church wishes that we should call this divine Mother our hope. “*Spes nostra salve.*” The impious Luther could not endure that the church should teach us to call Mary our hope. He said that our hope ought to rest in God alone—not in the creature ; and that God curses him who places his confidence in creatures : “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man.”—Jer. xvii. 5. True ; but that is understood of those who trust in creatures, in contempt of God, or independantly of him. But we hope

in Mary, as our mediatrix with the Lord. In the same manner as Jesus is our mediator of right with his Eternal Father, because by the merits of his passion he obtains pardon for penitent sinners, so Mary is mediatrix by divine favour with her son, and is such a mediatrix that her son grants her every request; nay that he wishes that every grace should pass through her hands. "The Lord," says St. Bernard, "has placed in Mary the plentitude of all good; so that if aught of hope, or grace, or salvation, is in us, we know that we derive it from Mary."—Serm. de aquæd. The Lord has confided to Mary the treasure of mercies which he wishes to have dealt out to us, and therefore wishes that we should acknowledge every grace as coming through her. Whence the saint calls her his chief confidence, and the principal ground of his hope. "*Hæc maxima mea fiducia hæc tota ratio spei meæ.*" For which reason he exhorts us to look for grace always through the intercession of Mary. "*Queremus gratiam et per Mariam queremus.*" And for the same reason the church, in despite of Luther, calls Mary our hope, "*Spes nostra salve.*"

Hence also do the saints call Mary the ladder, the moon, and the city of refuge. She is called by St. Bernard the ladder of sinners: "*Hæc scala peccatorum.*" It is sin which separates us from God. "But your iniquities have divided

between you and your God.”—Isa. lix. 2. A soul in the state of grace is in union with God, and God in union with it. “He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.”—1 John iv. 16. But when the soul turns her back upon God, then is she separated from him—plunged into an abyss of misery, and as far removed from him, as sin itself. But when shall this wretched soul find a ladder by which to mount once more to God, and be again united to him? Mary is that ladder, to whom, if the sinner have recourse, no matter what his misery, or how great the filth of sins, he can come out of the pit of perdition. “You,” says St. Bernard, “do not abhor the sinner, however loathsome he be; if he once sigh to you, you reach him your hand to draw him out of the gulph of despair.”—Orat. paneg. ad B. V. For the same reason is she called the moon; “Fair as the moon.”—Cant. vi. 9. “As the moon,” says St. Bernard, “is placed between the sun and earth, so is Mary stationed between God and us, to pour out his graces continually upon us.”—Serm. 14. de Nat. Dom. Hence, also, she is called the city of refuge, as she is made to call herself by St. John Damascene: “Ego civitas omnium ad me confugientium.” In the ancient law there were five cities of sanctuary; to which, if any one fled, he was secure of not being pursued by justice,

no matter what his crime. At present we have not so many cities of sanctuary—we have only Mary, to whom if any one shall have fled, he may rest secure of not being pursued by the divine justice. In the cities of the old law, every delinquent was not secure, nor could all his crimes escape unpunished ; but Mary is a city of refuge, which receives every criminal. “There is no one so much cast off by God,” said this blessed Mother to St. Bridget, “who, if he have recourse to me, shall not return to God, and receive pardon.”—Rev. lib. 1. cap. vi.

Mary, so far from disdaining to assist sinners, prides herself upon the function of advocate of sinners, so that she is related to have said to the venerable sister, Mary Villain, “next to my dignity of mother of God, there is nothing which I so much value as my office of advocate of sinners.” “To this end,” says Idiota, who takes it from St. John Chrysostom, “have you been chosen from eternity mother of God, that those whose sins should exclude them from participation in the merits of your Son, might be made partakers of them by your intercession.” This was the principal office for the fulfilment of which God created her, and placed her in the world : “feed thy kids.”—Cant. 1, 7. By kids he means sinners, and those kids are given in care to Mary, in order that they, who, on the day of judgment, should, by

their sins have deserved to stand upon the left, may, by her intercession, stand upon the right. "Feed thy kids," says William of Paris, "whom thou shalt convert into sheep, that they who should have been placed to the left, may, through thy intercession, take their stand upon the right." But we must not forget to notice what has been said upon this passage by William of England: "feed thy kids." Who are the kids of Mary? "these sinners," he says, "who pay her no devotion, who do not beg of her to obtain their conversion, are not the kids of Mary, and shall be placed on the left." St. Bridget one day heard Jesus Christ saying to his mother, "you give assistance to every one endeavouring to rise to God." Mary assists every one who does himself violence to leave his evil life, and turn to God, or at least, prays to her that he may receive strength to do so; if he have not that desire, the divine mother herself cannot assist him. Mary then assists only those sinners who honour her by some special devotion, and who, if they yet remain in disgrace with God, have recourse to her, that she may obtain pardon for them, and work their deliverance from their present infernal condition. The sinner who acts thus from his heart is secure, because Mary, as we have said before, has been, therefore, created that she might have charge of sinners, and lead them to

God. The Lord revealed this to St. Catherine of Sienna : "*Hæc est a me electa tanquam esca dulcissima ad capiendos hominos, potissimum peccatores.*"—Ap. Blos. mon. spir. And the blessed mother herself said to Saint Bridget, that as the magnet attracts iron, so she draws the hard hearts of men to herself and to God. "*Sicut magnes attrahit ferrum sic ego attraho dura corda.*"—Rev. lib. iii. cap. 32. But we must always bear in mind that these hearts, notwithstanding their hardness, must desire liberation from their unhappy state. Ah, if all had recourse to Mary with, at least this desire, she would procure salvation for all. "What fear of damnation should that man feel," says the Abbot Adam, "to whom Mary offers herself for a mother, and an advocate?" He enquires again, "could it be possible that you, the mother of mercy, should not intercede with the Redeemer for the soul he has redeemed?" He lastly makes answer : "Ah, you must intercede, because God who placed his Son mediator between man and heaven, has placed you mediator between his Son and guilty man."

Then sinner, says St. Bernard, give thanks to him who has provided you with such a mediatrix : "*Age gratias ei, qui talem tibi mediatricem providit.*"—Serm. in sign. mag. Thank your God, who, in order to manifest his mercy towards you, has given you not only his Son for a mediator in

his own right, but that you might have more confidence ; has given you Mary as a mediatrix with that Son. Therefore it is, St. Austin calls her the only hope of sinners. "*Spes unica peccatorum.*" And St. Bonaventure : " If by reason of your iniquities you see the Lord in anger, and fear to approach him, have recourse to the hope of sinners, who is Mary. She will not reject you because you are too wretched ; "it is her office to assist the wretched." And William of Paris says exactly the same : " It is thy office to place thyself between God and man."—Cap. 18. de *Reth. lib.* Hence, when we have recourse to Mary, let every one say to her with Saint Thomas of Villanova : " Ah, therefore, thou our advocate fulfil thy office." Since you are mother of God, and advocate of the wretched, assist me who am so wretched, if you do not assist me, I am lost ; and let us proceed to address her in the words of St. Bernard : " Remember, O most pious virgin, that from the beginning, etc. etc." I do not wish to be the first unhappy man who shall have had recourse to you, and yet be abandoned by you.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE TENTH.

For the Feast of St. Joseph.

GOD, through the great love which he bears us, and the great desire which he has for our salvation, has added to the other means of salvation which he has offered us, that of devotion to the saints, whom, as being his friends, he wishes to intercede for us, and procure for us by their prayers those graces which we do not deserve ourselves. And this is not because the merits of Jesus Christ are not superabundantly sufficient to obtain every grace for us, but because he wishes to honour his faithful servants, by making them co-operators in the work of our salvation, and on the other hand to give us a greater assurance of obtaining graces by means of his saints. But who does not know that amongst all the saints, Joseph is the most dear to God after the divine mother, and most powerful to obtain graces from God for those who implore his intercession.—Hence, our discourse divides itself into two points. We shall consider in the first, how strongly the dignity of St. Joseph should engage us to revere

him ; and in the second, how greatly we should confide in the protection of St. Joseph, by reason of his sanctity.

FIRST POINT.

Most assuredly we ought to honour St Joseph, since Jesus Christ himself has honoured him by calling him his Father. “Christ,” says Origen, “paid to Joseph the honour due to a father.”—Orig. hom. 17. in Luc. cap. 2. And he bore the name of father in the gospel. “And his father and mother were wondering at these things which were spoken concerning him.”—Luke ii. 23. He is so styled by the divine mother also : “Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.”—Ibid. ii. 48. If then, the King of Kings has raised him to such an honour, it is meet and just that we should honour him as much as in us lies. “Ab hominibus valde honorandus quem Rex Regum sic voluit extollere.”—Card. Camer. tract. de S. Joseph. What angel, or what other saint has been thought worthy to be called the father of the Son of God ? “Nomine patris neque angelus neque sanctus meruit appellari : hoc unus Joseph potuit nuncupari.” Hence, we may well apply to St. Joseph the words of St. Paul : “being made so much better than the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name than

they.”—Heb. i. 4. By this name of Father, God has conferred more honour upon Joseph than upon all the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and bishops ; these he calls his servants, Joseph only did he style his father.

And now behold him as father, constituted head of that little family, small in point of numbers, but great, by the reason of the two great persons it contained, namely, the mother of God, and the only Son of God, made man : “He made him master of his house.”—Ps. 104, 21. In the house of that blessed family he was Lord, and the Son of God was obedient to him ; “and he was subject to him.”—Luke ii. 25. “This subjection,” says Jerson, “denotes at once the great humility of Christ, and the great dignity of Joseph.”—Serm. de nat. virg. “And what greater dignity can there be,” pursues the same person, “than to command him who has it written upon his thigh, that he is the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords ?”

Josue astonished the world when he commanded the sun to stop, that he might have time to defeat his enemies, and was obeyed by him. “The Lord obeying the voice of a man.”—Jos. x. 14. But, what comparison can there be between the obedience of the sun (which is an inanimate creature,) to Josue, and the obedience of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God to Joseph ? Jesus

Christ, as long as Joseph lived, respected and obeyed him as a father ; his obedience lasted for thirty years. " He was subject to them ;" so that during so many years the Saviour was occupied solely in obeying Joseph. To Joseph, during all that time, fell the office of ordering all things as head of the family ; and the part of Jesus was to obey, as being subject to Joseph, whom God placed over him with the authority of father. Hence, Jesus did nothing, never moved a step, or tasted food, or went to rest, but according to the directions of Joseph ; and was, on the other hand, all attention and obedience to my commands. The Lord revealed this to St. Bridget in the following words : " My Son was so obedient, that when Joseph said, do this, or that, he at once did it."—Lib. 6. Revel. cap. 58. Hence, Jerson writes, " he often prepares their meals, cleanses the vessels, or draws water at the fountain."—In Joseph dest. 3. St. Bernard, speaking of Joseph, calls him " The faithful and prudent servant whom the Lord appointed the comfort of his mother, the foster-father of his humanity, and his chief earthly coadjutor in his great design."—Hom. 2. sup. miss. Not only then was Joseph destined to be the consolation of the mother of God in her many tribulations, and the nursing father of Jesus, but in a certain sense to co-operate with him in the redemption of the world, which was the design

occupying the councils of the three divine persons. God having given him the place of father over his Son, entrusted to him the care of his support and defence : "Take the child," as if he were to say to him in the words of the psalmist, "to thee is the poor man left."—Ps. x. 14. Joseph I have committed to your charge my Son upon this earth ; I have given him to you poor, humble, without riches, without splendour, or apparent greatness, he is called the Son of a carpenter ("Is not this the carpenter's Son?"—Matt. xiii. 55.) from your humble calling ; because I have wished you to be poor as holding the place of father towards my Son, who is poor, and who has come into the world, not to rule there, but to suffer and to die for man's salvation. You then shall be his guardian, and his father in my place ; "to thee is the poor man left." I resign him into your hands ; he shall be persecuted, and you shall share his persecution ; take care of him, be faithful to me. "And therefore," says St. John Damascene, "did he give to Joseph the love, the vigilance, and the authority of a father." He gave to him the affection of a father, in order that he might guard him with the tenderest love, and the vigilance of a father, that he might guard him with all watchfulness, and the authority of a father to secure him obedience in all the arrangements he should make for our Lord.

Having, as St. Bernard says, made him a co-operator in the work of our redemption, he wishes him to be present at the birth of our Lord, in order that he might be the faithful witness of the glory which the angels gave to God at the birth of his Son, as had been revealed to the shepherds, who disclosed it to Mary and Joseph when they came to visit the Saviour who had been announced to them ; he was moreover witness of the visit of the Magi, who, led by the star, came from the east to adore the heavenly infant, as they themselves declared ; “for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to adore him.”—Matt. ii. 2. God wished that Joseph should, jointly with Mary, present to him the child ; “they carried him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord.”—Luke ii. 22. Yielding him up to death for the salvation of the world, according to the scriptures, the predictions contained in which, relative to the passion of Jesus Christ, were always known to Joseph and Mary.

Next, the Lord seeing that Herod, through fear of losing his kingdom, sought to take the life of the divine infant, commanded Joseph by an angel, to take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt. “Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell you, for it will come to pass

that Herod will seek the child to destroy him.” —Matt. ii. 13. Behold, Joseph in obedience to the voice of God, on that very night (for so the commentators will have it,) takes the child and his Mother, and sets off for Egypt. Joseph, without loss of time, gathers up what implements of trade he can bring along with him, on which his poor family depends for support ; Mary, on the other hand, takes her infant, with his scanty clothes, and both set off without servant or companion, unprovided pilgrims, to cross the many dreary deserts which lay between them and Egypt, where they had neither friend nor relative, and had to meet a barbarous and unknown race of people. Joseph upon his arrival, laboured night and day, as St. Bernard says, for the support of his holy spouse and the divine infant. After a time he leaves Egypt in obedience to the new command received from the angel, who says to him, “ arise, and take the child and his mother, and go unto the land of Israel.”—Matt. ii. 20. Upon leaving Egypt, he directs his steps towards Judea, but being again warned by the angel not to live there, as Archelaüs the son of Herod reigned then in his father’s room, he withdrew to Nazareth in Galilee, where he dwelt till his death, in the company of his beloved Jesus, continuing to earn a poor subsistence by his humble trade.

It happened after some time, that going with Mary and Jesus then twelve years old, to visit the temple, he found upon his return when he met Mary, that Jesus whom he believed to be with her had been missing for three days, he did nothing else than weep, not having near him Jesus who was the love of his heart ; but what afflicted him most, was the fear that Jesus had left him on account of some offence which he had received from him, and which he thought had rendered him unworthy of being any longer the guardian of such a treasure, as Laspergio writes. But he was consoled by hearing from Jesus himself, that he remained in the temple about his father's business. Joseph continued thenceforward, to govern our Lord until his death, which he had the happiness of meeting between Jesus and Mary, who assisted him at that moment ; whence St. Francis of Sales says, we may hold for certain that Joseph died of love, as did Mary his spouse.

SECOND POINT.

We ought to confide greatly in the protection of Joseph, for his sanctity makes him very dear to God. In order to conceive the sanctity of Joseph, we have only to remember that he was chosen by God to fill the place of father towards

Jesus Christ. St. Paul has those words, "who hath also made us fit ministers of the new testament."—Cor. iii. 6. Which implies, as St. Thomas explains it, that when God chooses any person for an office, he gives all the graces necessary for the discharge of his duty therein. "*Quando Deus quosdam ad aliquid eligit ita disponit ut ad id inveniantur idonei.*"—3 Prop. quæ 27. art 4. God then having intended Joseph to fill the place of father over the incarnate word, was most assuredly bound to endow him with all the wisdom and holiness necessary for such an office. Nor should we doubt of his having enriched him with all the graces and privileges granted to the other saints; Gerson and Suarez say, that St. Joseph had three special privileges, first, that of having been sanctified in his mother's womb, like Jeremias and John the Baptist; secondly, of having been confirmed in grace, and thirdly, of never having felt the motions of concupiscence, a privilege which St. Joseph, by the merits of his purity, is entitled to share with his clients, by freeing them from these same motions.

St. Joseph in the gospel is called just, "Joseph her husband being a just man."—Matt. i. 19. What is the meaning of a just man? It means, says St. Peter Chrysologus, a perfect man, a man who possesses every virtue. Joseph was holy before his marriage, but still more so after his

union with the divine mother; the bare example of his holy spouse would have been sufficient to sanctify him. But if Mary, as St. Bernardine of Sienna says, is the dispensatrix of all the graces which God bestows on man, how profusely must she not have enriched her spouse with them, whom she so much loved, and who loved her so well. How immensely must not the sanctity of Joseph have been increased by the conversation and familiarity of Jesus during the many years they lived together. If the two disciples who were going to Emmaus, found themselves influenced with love, in the few moments during which the Saviour walked and conversed with them, so as to say, "was not our heart burning within us whilst he spoke in the way?"—Luke xxiv. 32. What a fire of holy charity must we not believe to have been enkindled in the heart of Joseph by thirty years conversation with Jesus Christ, by hearing constantly from him the word of life, by observing his perfect humility, patience and obedience, by seeing him so ready to assist him in his labours in every thing which required to be done about the house? What a conflagration of divine love must not those torches of charity have spread in the breast of Joseph, a breast which was free from every earthly affection. It is true that he had a great love for his spouse Mary; but his was not a divided

love, although, as the apostle says, the heart of the husband is usually divided. "But he that has a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided."—1 Cor. vii. 33. No, the love which he felt for his spouse, filled him still more with divine love, and therefore, we cannot doubt that Joseph whilst he lived with Jesus Christ, increased so much in sanctity and merits, that we may say he excels all the other saints.

The apostle writes that Jesus Christ, in the other world, "will render to every man according to his works."—Rom. ii. 6. With what glory, think you, must he not have adorned Joseph, who so faithfully loved and served him on this earth? On the last day, the Saviour will say to his elect, "For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me."—Matt. xxv. 35. Those have fed, and lodged, and clothed Jesus Christ, in the person of the poor; but St. Joseph procured food, and raiment, and lodging, for Jesus Christ in person. Moreover, the Lord has promised a reward to whosoever gives a poor man a drop of cold water in his name. "For whosoever shall give you to drink a cup of water in my name amen, I say to you, he shall not lose

his reward."—Mark ix. 40. Who can tell what ought to be the reward of Joseph—of him, who can say to Jesus Christ, Lord, I have not only furnished you with food and raiment, and lodging, but have even saved you from death, by rescuing you from the sword of Herod. All this should serve to increase our confidence in Joseph, by bringing us to the conclusion, that on account of all these merits, God cannot deny him any favour which he solicits for his clients.

St. Bernardine of Sienna says, "We may be assured that the same filial reverence and respectful familiarity with which Jesus Christ treated Joseph while on this earth, he not only does not deny him in heaven, but has rather increased towards him."—Serm. de S. Jos. Recollect, "reverence," and "familiarity." That Lord who on the earth revered St. Joseph as father, certainly denies him nothing in heaven. Besides this, although St. Joseph had no authority over the humanity of Jesus Christ, as natural father, yet he had it in a certain degree, as husband of Mary; who, as natural mother of the Saviour, had true authority over him, for he who has a right to the tree, has a right also to the fruit. On this account Jesus Christ respected Joseph on the earth, and looked upon him as his superior. And on the very same account, his

prayers are looked upon by Jesus as commands. "Dum Pater orat natum, velut imperium reputatur."—Serm. de S. Jos.

Let us hear what St. Bernard says of the power which Joseph has of his dispensing graces to his clients : "To some saints," he says, "it is given to protect us upon certain occasions, but to Joseph it is allowed to help us in every necessity, and to defend all who fly to him." And what St. Bernard writes as his belief, St. Theresa confirms by her experience. "It appears," she says, "that to the other saints it is given to succour us in some one necessity ; but we know from experience, that Joseph can succour us in every need." Let us rest assured of this, that as Jesus Christ on earth was subject to Joseph upon the earth, he is subject to him still in heaven, in this sense, that he grants his every request. Let us then imagine we hear the Lord addressing to each of us the words which Pharaoh spoke to the people during the time of the famine in Egypt : "Go to Joseph."—Gen. xli. 55. Go to Joseph, if you desire to be consoled. By the mercy of the Lord, there are few Christians at present, who are not, to some extent, devout to St. Joseph ; but those do assuredly receive most graces who have recourse to him most frequently, and with greatest confidence. Wherefore let us not

fail to recommend ourselves every day and night to St. Joseph, who, next to divine Mary, is most powerful with God. Let us not fail to address to him, each day, some special prayer; and let us increase our prayers during his novena, and let us fast upon his eve, and beg favours of him; all of which he will obtain for us, provided they be useful to our souls. I exhort you to apply to him more especially for the three following graces, namely, pardon of your sins, love of Jesus Christ, and a good death. With regard to the pardon of your sins, look at the matter thus: if, while Jesus lived on earth with Joseph, a sinner wanted to obtain pardon of his sins, could he do better to insure a pardon than apply to Joseph? If, then, we wish to obtain pardon, let us apply to Joseph, who is now more beloved of Jesus Christ than he was on earth. Let us, moreover, beg of St. Joseph to procure for us the love of Jesus Christ; and I, for my part, hold, that tender love for the Word Incarnate is a grace, the obtaining of which for us, belongs most specially to Joseph, by reason of the tender love which the saint bore towards him in this world. Lastly, let us beg of him to procure us the grace of a happy death; it is known to all that Joseph is the protector of the death-bed, because he had the happiness of dying between Jesus and Mary. Whence his clients

ought to hope that at their death they shall see Jesus and Joseph coming to assist them. Of this there are many examples.

Moverio tells that in the year 1541, brother Alessio of Vigevand, a Capuchin lay brother being about to die, begged of the brethren to light some candles. They asked him why? he said, that he expected a visit from Joseph and most holy Mary in a few moments; scarcely had he so spoken when he exclaimed, behold Joseph and the queen of heaven; kneel brethren, to receive them, and having said this he tranquilly expired, on the nineteenth of March, the very day consecrated to St. Joseph. It is related by Father Patrignam (and he takes the account from St. Vincent Ferrer and other authors,) that a certain merchant in the city of Valenza, was in the habit of inviting every year upon his birth day, an old man and a woman with a child at her breast to his table, in honour of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This devout man appeared after his death, to a person who was praying for him, and told him that he had been met in his passage by Jesus, Mary and Joseph, who said to him, you were in the habit of receiving us every year into your house, in the person of those poor people whom you brought to your table, we are now come to receive you into our house, and having so spoken they led him to paradise. It is related

also in the "Leggendario Francescano," that the venerable sister Prudentsiana, who was very devout to St. Joseph, had the happiness of seeing the saint approach her death bed with Jesus in his arms, she would now speak to St. Joseph, now to Jesus, and in this heavenly company she breathed out her soul." In the history of the discalced carmelites, it is related of sister Anna di Sant Agostino, that when she was dying, some of the religious saw her assisted by St. Joseph and St. Theresa, and transported with joy ; another religious, belonging to another convent saw her ascending to heaven between St. Theresa and St. Joseph. A religious of the order of St. Austin, as we learn from Father John de Allora, in his book upon St. Joseph, appeared to a companion of his, and told him that he had been saved from hell by means of a particular devotion to St. Joseph, and then mentioned that the saint, as reputed father of our Lord, was all powerful with him.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE ELEVENTH.

For the Feast of the Annunciation.

“ Et verbum caro factum est.”

“ And the word was made flesh.”—*John i. 14.*

THE angelic doctor St. Thomas, calls the mystery of the incarnation of the eternal word, the miracle of miracles, “ *miraculum miraculorum.*” And what greater miracle could be exhibited to the world, than that of a woman becoming mother of God, and a God clothed with human flesh. Let us, to-day, consider the following great prodigies.

First, Mary by her humility made mother of God ; secondly, the Creator transformed by his goodness, into a son of the creature.

FIRST POINT.

God having resolved to manifest to the world his immense goodness, by humbling himself so far as to become man, in order to redeem lost man ; and being to choose a virgin for his mother, looked out for the most humble. He

found that the Virgin Mary excelled all others as much in humility, as in sanctity, and her he made choice of for his mother. "Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid."—Luke i. 48. "He does not say," writes St. Laurence Justinian, "that he regarded the virginity, or the innocence, but the humility of his handmaid; and before him St. Jerome said: "*Maluit Deus de virgine incarnari propter humilitatem quem propter aliam virtutem.*" God preferred the virgin for his mother, on account of her humility more than any other virtue.

Let us now consider how Mary was prefigured in the Canticles, by the spikenard there spoken of. The spikenard is a small and lowly plant, but of sweet odour, and thus did the odour of Mary's humility draw the King of Heaven from the bosom of his eternal Father, where he was reposing, and bring him down to her womb, there to put on human flesh. "While the King was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odour thereof."—Cant. i. 77. Hear how St. Austin explains the passage: "The spikenard is a lowly but fragrant herb, and signifies the blessed Virgin, who exhaled the odour of humility." And before him, St. Bernard: "Truly worthy was she of the divine regard; truly worthy to attract the King of Heaven by her beauty, and by her sweet odour to draw him from his repose in

the bosom of the Father.”—Serm. iv. de Ass. Thus God induced by the humility of the holy Virgin, chose her for his mother when about to become man for the redemption of the world. Nevertheless, he did not wish to become her Son without first having obtained her consent, and he acted thus for the greater glory and merit of that mother : “ *Noluit carnem sumere ex ipsâ nolente ipsâ,*” says William the Abbot.—In cant. iii. And behold, whilst the humble Virgin in her poor dwelling, sighs and prays for the coming of the Lord, (as was revealed to St. Elizabeth, a Benedictine virgin,) the Archangel Gabriel, entrusted with the great embassy of God, approaches and salutes her : “ Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women.”—Luke i. 28. Hail Mary, full of grace, since thou art rich with grace, exceeding that of men and angels ; the Lord is with you, and shall ever remain with you by his grace ; thou art blessed amongst all women, since all others have been born under the curse of original sin ; but you have been kept free from every stain, and have always been, and ever shall be blessed.

This salutation so full of praise, how is it met by the humility of Mary ? She makes no reply, but astonished at so much praise, remains disturbed and confused ; “ Who, having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought within

herself what manner of salutation this should be."—Luke i. 29. What should disturb her? perhaps the fear of illusion? That cannot be, she knows full well that her visitant is a heavenly messenger; perhaps through modesty, seeing that the angel had the form of man. No, for the text, says she, "was troubled at his saying;" or, as Eusebius Emissenus, expresses it: "*non in vultu sed in sermone.*" This trouble then, all arose from her humility, which was confounded by those great praises which were so far from her thought. Hence, the more she is exalted by the angel, the more she humbles herself, and sinks into her own nothingness. St. Bernardine of Sienna writes, that if the angel had told her she was the most guilty mortal in the world, she should not have been so much astonished; by that she was astonished, and troubled at hearing so many encomiums, of which she deemed herself unworthy: "*Si dixisset, O Maria tu es major ribalda quæ est in mundo non ita mirata fuisset; unde turbata fuit de tantis laudibus.*"—Serm. 35. de An. inc. part 3.

But the holy Virgin who was already well versed in the sacred scriptures, knew that the time of the coming of the Messiah was at hand; she knew that the weeks of Daniel had been completed, and that the sceptre of Juda, according to the prophecy of Jacob, had passed into

the hands of a foreign king ; she knew also that the mother of the Messiah was to be a virgin. Knowing all this, she heard herself saluted by the angel in a strain of praise, which could only be addressed to her who was to be the mother of God, and then, perhaps the thought, or at least the suspicion, first struck her, that she was that chosen mother. No, her humility never could have suggested such a thought. No, these praises threw her into a state of fear, from which the angel was obliged to draw her by encouraging her not to fear, as St. Peter Chrysologus writes. "Christ was ministered to by an angel, and so it was befitting that the Virgin should be encouraged by an angel likewise." The angel Gabriel encouraged her by saying, "fear not Mary, for thou hast found grace with God." As if he had said, why should you fear Mary ? do you not know, that God exalts the humble ? You look upon yourself as something low and base, and therefore, God in his goodness, means to exalt you to the dignity of his mother. "Behold ! thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son ; and shalt call his name Jesus."

The angel now pauses to receive her answer, and know from her whether she be willing to become mother of God. Here St. Bernard appeals to her in these words : "The angel awaits his answer, and we also, O Lady, on whom the sen-

tence of damnation weighs so grievously ; we also await the word of pity."—Hom. 4. sup. missus. "Behold ! the price of our salvation is offered to you, we shall be delivered at once if you consent." O holy Virgin, to thee is offered the price of our salvation, that is, the blood which the Son made man in thy womb will shed, to pay the forfeit of our sins, and free us from death ; if you consent we shall be delivered." The same who has desired to have you for his mother, desires equally to have your consent, by which he has resolved to save us." And, "why," says St. Austin, "why, O sacred Virgin, do you retard the salvation of the world?"—Serm. xxi. de temp.

Mary gives answer to the angel : "Behold the hand-maid of the Lord ! be it done to me according to thy word."—Luke i. 38. O admirable answer, which rejoicest Heaven, and pourest upon the earth a treasure of blessings ! Answer, which hast drawn from the bosom of the father, his eternal Son, that he may become man ! Scarcely had the Virgin spoken, when "the Word was made flesh !" and the Son of God became the Son of Mary. "O powerful fiat, exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova ! O efficacious fiat ! O most venerable fiat !" by that fiat heaven was lowered to earth, and earth exalted to heaven.

But, let us look more narrowly into the reply

of Mary: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord!" By this answer, the humble virgin meant to say, I am prepared to do all the Lord requires of me; if he see my nothingness, and if all I have be his, who can say that he has chosen me by reason of my merit? "Behold the handmaid of the Lord!" How can a servant deserve to be the mother of her Lord? Let not then, the handmaid receive praise, but only the goodness of God who has deigned to look upon a creature so lowly, and exalt her so much. "O humility!" says the Abbot Guerico, "*angusta sibi, ampla divinitati, insufficiens sibi, sufficiens ei quem non capit orbis.*" O the humility of Mary, which makes her little in her own eyes, but great in the eyes of God; unworthy in her own opinion, but in the esteem of God, worthy to bear in her womb, him whom the whole world cannot contain. Let us hear the expressions of admiration with which St. Bernard speaks of the humility of the blessed Virgin. "What exceeding humility, in union with such purity, such innocence, such fulness of grace." He then addresses himself to the divine Virgin, and says: "Whence hast thou received this humility, O thou blessed one, and such humility?" Lucifer, seeing himself endowed by God with great glory, would fain place his throne above the stars, and make himself equal to God, saying: "I will exalt my throne above the stars

L

of God, I will be like the Most High.”—Isa. xiv. 13, 14. But, what would the proud angel have said, had his privileges been equal to those of Mary? He, when exalted by God, became proud and was cast into hell; but the humble Mary, the more she saw herself enriched with the gifts of God, shrunk back the more into her own nothingness, and God exalted her to such dignity, that except God, there is no being comparable to her; as has been said by St. Andrew Cretense: “*Excepto Deo, omnibus est altior.*”—*Orat. de dormit. Deip.* Hence St. Anselm says, “nothing O Lady is equal to thee, for whatever is, must either be above or below thee, God alone is above thee, and all else below thee.”—*Pelbart. stellar. 2. par. 3. art. 2.*

And to what greater dignity can a creature be exalted, than to that of mother of God? “To be mother of God,” says St. Bonaventure, “is the most exalted dignity that can be conferred upon a pure creature; God might have made a greater earth, a greater heaven; but a greater creature than the mother of God he could not make.”—*Spec. B. V. sec. 10.* And this the Virgin herself meant to convey when she said, “he that is mighty hath done great things to me.”—*Luke i. 49.* Here the Abbot Cellense addresses her. “God,” he says, made thee not for himself alone; “but for men, that through thee the ruin brought

upon them by sin might be repaired." Let us now come to the second point.

SECOND POINT.

Adam our first father sinned, and ungrateful to God for all the favours conferred upon him, rebelled by eating the forbidden fruit. God was therefore obliged to drive him out from his face, and condemn him with all his posterity to eternal death. But having compassion upon him, and the bowels of his mercy being moved, he resolved to come on earth and satisfy the divine justice, by paying with his own suffering person, the forfeit of our sins. "He came down from Heaven," as the holy church teaches us, "and was made man."* O prodigy! O excess of the love of a God! a God to become man! If a prince of the earth seeing a worm die in its hole, wished to restore it to life, and was told he could do so, on condition that he should humbly become a worm, and enter that hole in which the worm lay dead, and there giving up his life, make a bath of his blood, being immersed in which alone, the worm could be restored to life; what could the prince reply? would he not say, what should I care whether the worm live or die, that I should shed my blood to restore life to a worm?

* Nicene Creed.

How should it concern God if men be lost as they had deserved to be by their sins? He perhaps should have lost some of his happiness without man.

No, it was by reason of his excessive love for me that he came upon the earth, and dwindled into the form of man, which he took in the womb of a virgin. He became man, that is to say, a worm like one of us: he “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man.”—Phil. ii. 7. He, like the Father, is God, immense, sovereign, omnipotent, and in all things equal to the Father, but having been made man in the womb of Mary, he became a creature, a servant, weak, and less than the Father. Behold him humbled in the womb of Mary, taking upon him the duty of obedience to his Father, who would have him die as a criminal upon a cross, after thirty-three years of sufferings. “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross.” Let us with astonishment contemplate him in the womb of his mother; his will united to that of the Father, and his heart inflamed with love for us: let us behold him offering himself voluntarily for us. “He was offered because it was his own will.”—Isa. xliii. 8. He offers himself to suffer everything for our salvation. He foresees the scourge and offers his

flesh, he foresees the thorns and offers his head, he foresees the nails and offers his hands and feet, he foresees the cross and offers his life. Why has he wished to suffer so much for us ungrateful and sinners as we are? Why has he so much loved us? he "hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."—Apoc. i. 5. He beholds us in the filth of sin, and prepares for us a bath of his own blood, in which to cleanse ourselves and make ourselves dear to God.—"Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us."—Ephes. v. 2. He saw us condemned to death, and he prepares to die that we may live; and seeing us accursed of God by reason of our sins, he loaded himself with all our iniquity that he might remove the curse from us. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."—Gal. iii. 13. St. Francis of Paul, contemplating a God made man, and dying for our salvation had reason to exclaim often: O charity! O charity! O charity! If faith did not assure us of all that the Son of God had done and suffered for us, who could believe it? Ah, my brethren, the love which Jesus Christ had for us, constrains us to love him. "For the charity of Christ presseth us." How tender is not the sentiment of St. Francis of Sales, with regard to the above mentioned words of St. Paul when he says: "Knowing as we do

that Jesus the true God, loved us even unto death, the death of the cross, is not this knowledge a torch as it were, applied to our hearts? do we not find them, bound and strained, and love pressed into them, by a violence which is as powerful as it is amiable?"

But here come the complaints of St. John : "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."—John i. 2. And why should the Only Begotten of God ever have come upon the earth to suffer and to die for us, if not in order that we should love him? "*Deus factus est homo,*" writes Hugh of St. Victor, "*ut familiaris ab homine diligeretur.*"—In lib. sent. "To this end, chiefly," says St. Austin, "has Jesus Christ come into the world, that he might make known to men how much he loved them."—C. 4. de Catech. And if God has so much loved us, he claims with justice a portion of love from us. "*Notam facit dilectionem suam,*" says St. Bernard, "*ut experiatur et tuam.*"—Serm. 43. in Cant. To this end has he manifested his great love for us, that he might experience ours for him, who has come from heaven to become man and die for men, that they might love him; how comes it then that so few amongst men love him? Infinite beauty!—infinite loveliness! worthy of all love, behold I am one of those ungrateful beings whom thou hast so much loved, without

meeting a return ; who, instead of loving, have offended you. But, O Lord, you have become man, and died in order to obtain pardon for such sinners as should do penance, and detest their sins. Behold ! I am a sinner, it is true, but I repent me of my sins, and wish to love you ; have pity on me. And you, O holy Virgin, whom your humility has rendered worthy of being the Mother of God, and who, as such, are the mother, the refuge, and the advocate of sinners ! pray to Jesus for me ; recommend me to that Son, who so much loves you, and denies you nothing. Tell him to pardon me ; tell him to give me his holy love ; tell him to save me, that face to face I may one day love him in Paradise. Amen.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

SERMON THE TWELFTH.

Upon the Sorrows of Mary.

“ Stabat autem juxta Crucem Jesu Mater ejus.”

“ Now, there stood by the Cross of Jesus, his Mother.”—John
xix. 25.

WE are here, beloved brethren, to contemplate a new kind of martyrdom in the case of a mother, who must look on at the death of her innocent Son, executed like a felon upon an infamous gibbet. Mary is that mother, whom the holy church with too much reason calls the “Queen of Martyrs.” Yes, because Mary in standing beside the cross of Jesus, suffered a more grievous martyrdom than did all the martyrs in their torments.

She was, in the first instance, a martyr without parallel ; and in the second, a martyr without consolation.

FIRST POINT.

The words of the prophet Jeremias suit me here: “ To what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem

for great as the sea is thy destruction : who shall heal thee?"—Lam. ii. 13. No, the torments of all the martyrs can bear no comparison with the sufferings of Mary. "The martyrdom of Mary," says St. Bernard, "took place not by the sword of the torturer, but by grief of heart," according to the prophecy of Simeon, who said : "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce."—Luke ii. 35.

Arnoldo Carnotense writes, that whoever was present upon Calvary when the Immaculate Lamb was yielding up his life for the salvation of the world, beheld there two altars of sacrifice ; one in the body of Jesus Christ, and the other in the heart of Mary ; in which latter, Mary sacrificed her soul in compassion for her Son, when Jesus sacrificed his body in death.—Tract. de sept. verb. Dom. in cruc. St. Antoninus says, that the other martyrs sacrificed each his own life, but that Mary consummated her martyrdom by sacrificing the life of her Son, which she loved far more than her own ; and thus it was that her grief surpassed any other suffering which has been felt upon this earth.

It is well known that sufferings of children become the sufferings of the mothers who see them suffer. St. Austin, speaking of the mother of the Machabees, who was present during the martyrdom of her sons, says that love caused her to suffer all the sufferings of each one of her chil-

dren: "Illa videndo, in omnibus passa est, quia omnes amabat, ferebat in oculis quod in carne omnes."—Serm. 109. de div. cap. 6. Erasmus adds, that mothers feel greater pain on seeing their children suffer, than if they were sufferers themselves.—Libell. de Mach. With regard to ordinary mothers, that does not always happen; but with regard to Mary, it certainly did happen that she suffered more by seeing her Son upon the cross, than if she were to have suffered in her own person all the torments she saw inflicted upon him. "All the wounds which covered the entire body of Jesus," says St. Bonaventure, "were found together in the heart of Mary."—De plenit. Virg. in stim. amor. to afflict her during the passion of her Son; so that, as St. Laurence Justinian writes, her heart was, by affliction, converted into a mirror, in which were reflected all the outrages and insults suffered by Jesus Christ. "Passionis Christi speculum effectum erat cor Virginis; in illo agnoscebantur sputa, convicia, verbera, vulnera."—De agon. Christi, cap. 11. Thus, during the passion of her Son, Mary suffered in her heart, by reason of the love she bore him, the buffets, the scourges, the crowning with thorns, and was actually nailed in spirit with him to the cross.

The same St. Laurence, contemplating Jesus carrying his cross to Calvary, and seeing his af-

flicted mother following him, makes him turn to her and say : " Alas ! mother, whither do you follow me ? you shall be tortured in my torture, and I in yours. But his loving mother desists not from following him, although she knows that being present during his passion, will cost her a torture more severe than any death. She sees her Son carrying the cross on which he is to be nailed, and she takes up the cross of her grief and follows him—to be crucified along with him : " *Tollebat et mater crucem suam et sequebatur eum, crucifigenda eum ipso.*"—Gulielm. in cantic. 7. Hence, St. Bonaventure contemplating Mary, as she stood near her dying Son, exclaims : " tell me, O sacred mother, where were you when Jesus was dying ? were you near the cross ? No, you were on the cross itself."—Loc. cit. de planc. virg. Upon these words foretold for the Redeemer, by the prophet Isaiah : " I have trodden the vine-press alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with me."—Isa. lxiii. 3. Richard writes as follows : " Lord, it is true that you have not a man to accompany you, but there is a woman, and that woman your mother, to follow you, and receive all the wounds which are inflicted on your body, in her heart."—Richard. de laud. virg.

Other martyrs are painted with the instruments of their death in their hands, to signify by

what death they suffered ; thus St. Paul is represented with a sword in his hand, St. Andrew embracing a cross, St. Laurence having a grid-iron ; but Mary is represented with her dead Son in her arms, because the instrument of her martyrdom was no other than her Son, and the compassion which she felt for her Son, has made her the Queen of Martyrs. Pinamonti has a noble and singular sentiment with reference to this compassion felt by the blessed mother. He says, that the compassion of Mary for Jesus was so great, that she alone could worthily compassionate the death of a God made man, through love of men. The blessed Amadeus writes, that Mary, when beholding the passion of her Son, experienced more grievous tortures than had she been suffering in person, because she loved her Son incomparably more than herself. Hence, St. Idelphon-sus does not hesitate to assert, that you say little when you speak of Mary, as having suffered more than all the martyrs taken together.—Ap. Sinise. martirio di Maria cant. 36. And St. Anselm, addressing the blessed Virgin, says : “ Whatever cruelty has been exercised upon the bodies of the martyrs was trivial, or rather nothing compared with all that you suffered during the passion of your Son.”—St. Anselm de excell. virg. cap. v. The same saint adds, “No, Lady, I could not believe that you should have been able to sur-

vive such sufferings, did not the spirit of thy Son support thee."—Loc. cit. And St. Bernadine of Sienna, went so far as to say : " The grief of the blessed Virgin was so great, that if it were to be divided amongst all creatures capable of grief, they should expire under it." Who then can doubt for a moment, that the martyrdom of Mary was without parallel, since it exceeded the sufferings of all the martyrs taken together ; and since, as St. Antoninus says, other martyrs in dying, sacrifice only their own lives, but she sacrificed the life of her Son, which was infinitely dearer to her than her own.

SECOND POINT.

The martyrs suffered torments inflicted on them by tyrants, but the Lord, who never abandons his servants, failed not to console them under their torments. The love of God which burned in their hearts, rendered all tortures sweet to them. A Vincent was torn while stretched on the rack, with iron hooks, and burned with heated plates ; but St. Austin says, that the saint spoke so slightly of his torments, that the person who suffered appeared to be different from the person who spoke. A Boniface had his body torn with irons, and his nails and flesh pierced with thorns, and melted lead poured

into his mouth, and all the while he ceased not to thank Jesus Christ, who thought him worthy to suffer for his love. Laurence suffered on his gridiron; but the love with which he was inflamed prevented him from feeling the fire which was under him, or death itself. "*In illâ longâ morte, illis tormentis, tormenta non sensit.*"—S. Aug. tract. 27. As the holy martyrs felt their pain diminished in proportion to their torments, so the bare thought of the passion of Jesus Christ was sufficient to console them. Exactly the reverse took place in Mary, since the passion of Jesus was her martyrdom, and her love for him her only executioner. Here may the words of Jeremiah be applied: "for great as the sea is thy destruction; who shall heal thee?" As the sea is entirely salt, without one drop of fresh water, so the heart of Mary was all bitterness, without one drop of consolation. "Who shall heal thee?" Her Son was the only person who might console her; but, how should he, hanging upon the cross, console her, when the love she bore him was her sole tormentor?

In order, then, to understand the greatness of Mary's sorrow, we should know, according to Cornelius a Lapide, the greatness of the love which she bore to Jesus. But who can measure that love? The blessed Amadeo is of opinion, that in Mary's heart were found together the

natural love which she bore to Jesus, as her Son, and the supernatural love which she bore to him as her God : “ *Duæ dilectiones in unam connexerunt et ex duobus amoribus factus est unus.*” —Hom 5, de Laud. Virg. These two descriptions of love, were blent into one, and that, the greatest a pure creature was capable of. “As, then, there never has been found in a creature love to equal that which Mary had for Jesus, so neither has sorrow ever been found to equal hers.”—Rich. a St. Lauren.

“Now, there stood by the cross of Jesus, his Mother.” Let us pause awhile to consider these words, before we finish, and, having glanced at these, we shall have done; but let us here renew our attention. “There stood.” When Jesus hung upon the cross, he was abandoned by his disciples; they had all left him from the moment he was taken in the garden. “Then the disciples all leaving him, fled.”—Matt. xxvi. 56. The disciples abandoned him, but his loving Mother did not abandon him; she wished to stay by him and see him expire—she “stood by the cross.” Mothers, when they see their children suffer, and that they cannot give them assistance, have not strength to endure it, and therefore fly the sight. But Mary contemplated her Son as he hung agonizing upon the cross; she saw that his sufferings were fast depriving

him of life—she could have wished to succour him in that extremity—but it is not permitted her ; still she does not avoid the sight, she does not fly, but stands near the cross where her Son is expiring. The cross was the hard bed which Jesus was stretched upon in death. Mary, who stood beside it, never withdrew her eyes from him, but gazed upon him torn with the scourges, and the thorns, and the nails. She sees that her dear Son can find no rest hanging from three nails ; she could have wished, as I have said, to minister to him, or, at least, to expire in his arms ; but all is denied her. Ah, cross ! she said, give me back my Son—thou art the gibbet of malefactors, but my Son is innocent. Peace, sorrowing Mother ! the cross shall not restore you your Son, until he shall have breathed his last.

St. Bonaventure, contemplating the grief which Mary felt in the death of her Son, says himself that no grief could equal hers, because no Son ever was so dear to a mother : “ De compass. Virg.” “ If, then, there never was Son so amiable as Jesus, or Mother so loving as Mary, what grief can be compared to hers.”—Richard. lib. iii. de Laud. Virg. Mary saw that her Son was about to die, when, looking piteously upon him, she appeared to say, Ah, my Son ! you are about to leave me, and do you not say

a word at parting? leave me some memorial of you. The memorial he left her was, "Woman, behold thy Son," meaning St. John who stood near, and these were the words with which he took leave of his mother. He calls her woman, that he may not increase her sorrow by styling her mother. Woman, behold thy Son, he shall tend thee after my death.

"There stood by the cross his mother." Let us contemplate Mary for the last time standing at the foot of the cross, and beholding her Son as he expires. But, O God, what a Son dies there! a Son who had chosen her from eternity for his mother, preferring her before all womankind: A Son so beautiful, so holy, so lovely; a Son who had ever been obedient, a Son who was her only love, her Son and her God; and Mary has to see him die of pure pain before her eyes. But the last hour of Jesus now approaches, and the afflicted mother, has to see her Son yielding to the last assault of death; his body now relaxes, his head falls upon his breast, he opens his mouth and expires. The people around exclaim he is dead, and Mary too says, thou art indeed dead, my Jesus.

After Jesus had hung dead upon the cross for some time, his body was taken down. Mary goes to receive it, and having strained it to her bosom, gazes now upon that head wounded with thorns, those hands pierced with nails, that body

M

torn with scourges ; ah, my Son, she says, to what has the love thou didst bear to man reduced thee? But the disciples fearing lest she die while embracing her Son, approach, and with reverential violence take him from her arms, and rolling him in his shroud, carry him away to bury him. They are accompanied by the other mourning women, and with them still goes the sorrowful mother, following her Son to the tomb. St. Bernard says, that her grief was such as to cause all who met her to weep : “*Omnes plorabant qui obviabant ei ;*” and, he adds, that those who accompanied her were in tears for her, rather than for the Lord.

My brethren, let us be devout to the sorrowful Mary. Albertus Magnus writes, that “as we are indebted to Jesus Christ for his death, so we are indebted to Mary for the sorrow which she felt at the death of that Son, for the salvation of the world.”—Sup. miss. cap. 20. This an angel revealed to St. Bridget : the holy virgin, he said, sacrificed to God for our salvation, the life of her Son ; a sacrifice which, as we have said, cost her more pain than all the sufferings of the martyrs cost them. But the divine mother complained to St. Bridget, that very few compassionate her in her sufferings, whilst the greater number of men live forgetful of them ; whence, she said, to the saint, “if others forget me, you

at least, daughter, must not forget me." To such an end the blessed Virgin appeared in the year 1229, to the founder of the order of servants of Mary, that he might establish a devotion in memory of her dolours, which was afterwards done ; and Jesus himself one day, said to the blessed Veronica da Benasco : " Daughter, the tears which one sheds in contemplating my passion, are dear to me, but loving with immense love, as I do my mother Mary, I greatly value meditation upon the sorrow which she experienced during my passion." It may be well to mention also, what is said by Pelliarto, (stellar. 3. par. 3. art. 3.) to have been revealed to St. Elizabeth, a Benedictine virgin, which was, that the Lord has four graces for those who are devout to the sorrows of Mary. First, that, whoever invokes her by her dolours, shall have the grace of doing penance for his sins before death ; secondly, that she shall console such in all their tribulations, and especially at the hour of death ; thirdly, that the Lord shall imprint on their minds the recollection of his passion, and inspire them with a devotion to it ; fourthly, that he has empowered Mary to obtain what graces she pleases for those who are devout to her dolours.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

FAMILIAR DISCOURSE,

At the reception of a Nun.

DEVOUT sister, you should have constantly in mind this day on which you have the happiness of being espoused to Jesus Christ, that you may continually thank him for so great a favour. Do not imagine that you place Jesus Christ under an obligation to you by leaving the world for his sake; you ought on the contrary to feel yourself under an everlasting obligation to him for the grace which he has given you, in calling you to leave the world.

To-day you leave the world; you think perhaps you make a great sacrifice. What is this world? a land of thorns, of tears, of sorrow. The world promises great things to its votaries, pleasure, peace, contentment; but all turn into deceit, bitterness, and vanity. Even when the world bestows its riches, honours, and pleasures, they end in suffering and grief: "*Extrema gaudii luctus occupat.*" And God grant that for the many blind creatures who love the world, this grief may not become eternal, since in the world

the dangers are many and great, and end, all but inevitably, in the ruin of the soul, in the loss of Paradise and God.

Those poor maidens, who, deceived by the false promises of the world, leave Jesus Christ for the secular life, hope to find therein pleasure and contentment, but what the poor creatures experience shews that they find in it nought but thorns and gall. Their subordination to their husbands, the care of children and servants, the wants of the family and the other duties to which a woman living in the world is subjected, render her life so full of straits, and fear, and disgust, that it is if one may so speak, a continual martyrdom.

Enquire of married women whether they enjoy contentment. For my own part I know that as many as I have asked, I have found to be discontented, and full of trouble. On the other hand, ask those nuns who have left everything for God, whether they are satisfied with their condition, and they will answer you that they shall ever have to thank the Lord for having called them from the world. It is but too true what Cardinal Petrucio says, of the delights of those who love the world: "they have the semblance of joy, and are actually torments." But of the troubles of those who love God, he says, that "they have the semblance of torments, while they are actually joys." And, if that be the case

in this life, how shall those maidens fare who have left the world, and how those who have remained in it? Those who love the world will say, we shall be able to be holy in the world. To be holy? Hear me, daughter, lest the devil should think to disturb you afterwards upon this point: in order to be holy, it is not sufficient to desire holiness, you must employ the means conducive to it. You must every day spend some time in mental prayer, because salvation is very difficult for the soul that does not often think of God. You must frequent the sacraments by which God communicates himself to the soul; you must be totally detached from all earthly affections and vanities. But, speaking practically, how much time can be devoted to mental prayer by the mother of a family, who has her head filled with anxiety for children, servants, and all the occasions of the house? She shall scarce have time to say the rosary. How can she frequent the sacraments, if she can scarce afford to hear Mass upon a festival? How can she live detached from the world, while she lives in the midst of it? How then? some persons will say, is it impossible for a married person to be saved? We read of many married persons who became holy. Yes, even in the world a married person can become holy, provided she take care to practise as much as she possibly can, the devout ex-

ercises before mentioned, and above all to fortify herself with great patience, because she cannot become holy without great labour and fatigue ; I say that all holy married women, even princesses and queens, are martyrs of patience.

On the other hand, a religious who has abandoned the world to give herself wholly to God, how many helps and opportunities has she not of leading a well-regulated life, and becoming holy ? If she do nothing more than the little which the rule prescribes, and the community practices ; if she meditate every morning, communicate often in the week, hear mass every day, hear frequently the word of God, together with going through the spiritual exercises which are annually made during eight days, and the various other devotions which are practised in the convent ; this alone would suffice to make her a saint. Remember, daughter, when the devil shall tempt you with regard to your vocation to the religious state, that in the world few are saved, and that in religion, few, very few, are lost.

In a word, if you were to leave the convent, what spouse could you hope for beyond a gentleman, a nobleman, or a monarch ; but now you are espoused to the King of Heaven, and of all the kingdoms of the earth. How many holy virgins have renounced the most exalted earthly nuptials for Jesus Christ ? St. Agnes was sought

by many noble Romans, but she was content to have her head cut off rather than have any other spouse than Jesus Christ. The blessed Agnes refused the hand of the Emperor Frederick the Second, and shut herself up in a convent. St. Domatilla refused to marry a great lord the Count Aurelian, and therefore died a martyr, having been burned alive. St. Susanna was offered the hand of the Emperor Maximin ; but she, in order to retain Jesus Christ, chose rather to lose her head by the axe of the executioner, and died a martyr.

Leave, O daughter, leave to those maidens who love the world, all these pleasures and vanities, their dresses, their balls, and their plays ; enjoy you your Jesus. He, in your cell, will give you more content than all the pleasures, pomp, and riches, which are at the command of the princes of the earth. Here, in your lonely cell, you shall enjoy a Paradise, and a continual peace. If you love Jesus Christ, you will love the solitude which you will find in your cell. In it your crucified spouse will speak familiarly to your heart ; from that cross he will send rays of light into your soul, and darts of love into your bosom. Alone with him in your cell, you shall manifest to him the love you bear him, and continually make to him the offering of yourself, and all that you have ; you shall seek from him

the graces which you stand in need of; you shall make him acquainted with the difficulties and fears which afflict you, and he will console you. Do not doubt that the divine spouse will console you during life, and more especially at the hour of your death. Then it will not be matter of regret to you, that you do not die in the world, surrounded by children, relations, and servants, not one of whom will say a word to you for your soul's good ; but you will have the happiness of dying in the house of God, surrounded by your holy sisters in religion, who will all comfort you by pious conversation, and animate you to appear full of confidence before your loving spouse, who shall come to meet you with a crown in his hand to make you queen of his blessed kingdom, in recompense for the love which you have borne him.

I have said that the religious who are given entirely to God enjoy continual peace. I mean thereby, such peace as can be tasted in this vale of tears. God has prepared for us in Heaven, a full and perfect peace, free from every labour. This earth, on the contrary, is a place of merit, and therefore of suffering, where by crosses we become entitled to the joys of Paradise.

The spouse whom you have chosen this morning, my daughter, although the most noble, the greatest and the richest whom you could choose,

is called, and is, a bloody spouse : “ A bloody spouse art thou to me.” A bloody spouse, whose blood has been drained by dint of scourges, thorns and nails, for the salvation of your soul and of all mankind. Behold him then advancing, not crowned with flowers but with thorns, not adorned with gold and gems, but with blood and with wounds ; mark well his royal throne, and see if it be not a hard cross, on which he agonizes and dies, in a sea of ignominies and grief, through love of you. Hear how he invites you to follow him, and what you have to do if you follow him. “ If any one wish to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” The first thing he asks of you is, that you deny yourself. He wishes that you detach your heart from all creatures. He, your spouse, will never be satisfied with you, unless he see you all his own ; and you, in order to be all his, must divest yourself of every earthly affection, for parents, friends, vanity, dress, self-esteem, and self-will. Above all, you must guard your heart from any personal affection. When any creature wishes to deprive Jesus Christ of any portion of your love, all which he claims from you, answer it in the words of St. Agnes : “ Depart from me, food of worms ! I belong to another lover.” Depart from me, food of death ! Jesus Christ is my spouse ; he has been the first to love me—he has

gained my entire heart ; go away, because there is no room for you in that heart. And, beyond all things, my daughter, remember my warning when taking the sacred veil that shall be given you, which signifies that you are to hide yourself from the eyes of the world, and love no other lover on this earth than Jesus Christ, and when you shall say, "*posuit signum in faciem meam ut nullum præter eum amatorem admittam.*"

For the following reason, do you on this morning change your dress and name : first, you change your dress, you put off the dress of the world and take that of religion, in order that you may totally forget the world and all its vanities ; and secondly, you change your name, that the world may forget you, and that you being dead to the world, may be so wholly separated from it, that every person may look upon you as if you had ceased to live.

The second thing which Jesus requires of you, is, that you carry with resignation the cross which has been assigned you. Your cross shall be the observance of the rules of the convent, and obedience to the will of your superioress ; it is impossible for a nun who does not perfectly obey the rule of the community, and the commands of her superiors, to be a good religious. Your cross shall be to suffer patiently, all

the contradictions and mortifications, and humiliations which you shall meet with. Whoever cannot endure humiliations, shews that she is not humble, and whoever is not humble cannot become holy, and is in great danger of being lost. In a word, there is no other way to Paradise than the way of the cross, which must be borne with patience. And God finds in every place for those souls whom he loves, a cross to afflict them, and render them his real spouses.

I next conjure you, after you shall have taken the holy habit, to renew every day the promise which you shall have made to Jesus Christ, of being ever faithful to him. Love and fidelity are the chief qualities of a spouse. It is to this end that the ring shall afterwards be given you, in token of the fidelity with which you are to preserve the love which you have promised to Jesus Christ. But in order to be faithful to him, you must not rely solely on your promise, you must pray to Jesus Christ, and to his holy mother, for the gift of perseverance ; and you must endeavour to acquire a great confidence in Mary, who is the mother of perseverance. And should you feel the divine love growing cold within you, and your heart drawn to earthly objects, bethink you of this my other advice, and in order that you may not abandon yourself to tepidity, enquire of yourself, wherefore have I left the world,

my home, and my kinsfolk? is it to damn myself? This thought was wont to renew St. Bernard in fervour, and cause him to tread more steadily the path of perfection: "Bernarde ad quid venisti?" Bernard, said he to himself, why have you left the world, and entered the monastery? to become a saint. Why, then, do you not set about sanctifying yourself? And thus he succeeded in dying a saint. You, my daughter, by acting thus, may hope to become a saint, and see yourself amongst the many other virgins who reign in heaven a queen in that blessed kingdom. But I must have done speaking, since I am so commanded by him, who is eager to see you enter at once into his house. Behold him from this spot; see with what joy he expects you, with what affection he calls you to enter at once his royal palace, which is no other than this convent. Come on, then, and enter joyfully; for the reception which your spouse shall give you this morning in his house, is a foretaste of the reception which you shall meet from him after death in his heavenly kingdom.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

DISCOURSE

To the Brethren of a Confraternity.

IN the great deluge, in the days of Noah, nearly all mankind perished, eight persons only being saved in the ark. In our days a deluge, not of water, but of sins, continually inundates the earth, and from this deluge very few escape; speaking more especially of lay persons,* amongst whom scarcely any one is saved, with the exception of those who take refuge in some ark of salvation, in some confraternity of our Lady. You see innumerable laymen in a country amongst them how many are to be found in the state of grace? Scarcely shall you find any unless belonging to a confraternity. My brethren, you have already been at the exercises of the mission, and I hope that while there God has enlightened your minds, so as that you know there is no other fortune or advantage to be sought for in this

* The word made use of by the Saint, is *secular*; but as the word *secular* in this country is understood, almost universally, to apply to the Parochial Clergy, I have ventured to substitute a word conveying the meaning of the Saint. I could not, however, take it upon me to make anything like an alteration, without admonishing the reader of the circumstance.—[TRANSLATOR.]

life, except the salvation of one's soul. The world calls him happy who is rich and honoured, and him unhappy who is poor and despised ; but the truth is, that he only who lives in the grace of God, and is attaining to salvation, is happy, and that he who lives at a distance from God, and damns himself, is miserable and unhappy. In a few days death shall come upon him, and all will be over with him. And what will it avail a man in death to have gained the whole world, if he lose his own soul, and has to deplore its loss for ever in hell. Now, my brethren, I wish to show you how much hope of salvation there is for him who belongs to the confraternity of our blessed Lady.

When a lay person enquires of me, what he has to do in order to be saved, I do not recommend to him any more efficient or safer means than to join the confraternity. The confraternity is a means which embraces all that is most conducive to salvation ; whence a member of the confraternity may, with reason, say, "Now all good things come to me together with her." First, the frequent hearing of the word of God contributes most powerfully to the salvation of a lay person. On the other hand, the holy fathers look upon him as already lost, who despises the word of God, because the sheep of Jesus Christ willingly hear his word announced to them by his

priests: "My sheep hear my word."—John x. 27. The reason is, because those lay persons who are entirely occupied about earthly concerns, and do not hear the word of God, easily forget the good and evil things of the world to come, and thus abandon themselves to the pleasures of this life, and live and die in sin. But he who attends to the exercises of the confraternity, hearing frequently of death, judgment, hell, and eternity, easily resists the temptations by which he may be assailed, for which reason the Holy Ghost says, "remember thy last things, and thou shalt never sin."—Eccl. vii. 40.

Secondly, in order that a lay person should preserve himself in the grace of God, it is necessary for him to frequent the sacraments. These are the food of the soul, keeping it alive, more especially the holy communion, which is called bread; because, as the earthly bread sustains our bodily life, so this heavenly bread preserves the life of the soul. This the holy Council of Trent teaches, when it says that the Blessed Eucharist frees us from venial, and preserves us from mortal sin.

Thirdly, he who frequents the sodality is enriched with graces by Mary, through whom her Son wishes every grace to flow. "With me are riches," she says, "that I may enrich those who love me." St. Bonaventure writes, that he who has acquired

favour with Mary, is acknowledged by the citizens of Heaven, and that whoever bear her badges, will be written in the book of life. That is to be understood more particularly of the brethren of her confraternity, whose name, when written in the book of the confraternity, they may look upon as written in the book of life, provided they persevere in attending the exercises of the confraternity, and observing all its rules, for of what use is it to a man to have his name enrolled amongst the brethren, if he do not attend the confraternity, or if he attend it without frequenting the sacraments, the performance of which latter duty is the most important of all its rules? Some attend the confraternity not with a view to the honour of Mary, or the salvation of their own souls, but through a desire to rule there, and controul all things; for which reason, they often dispute and brawl at the meetings of the confraternity, as if they were in some place of amusement. He who does this, had better stay away.

Beyond all things, I recommend every one to attend the confraternity, and not to leave it on trifling occasions, as some do, who in order to amuse themselves, for some pleasure, or some little business, drop off, and when asked why? Father, they will say, business obliged me to leave the confraternity. But, my child, would I say to them, you know you have no business on this

earth so important as that of saving your soul. Tell me, would you forfeit the sum of a thousand pounds for sake of a few pence? When Sunday comes, my brethren, leave everything else, and attend the confraternity. Know that our Lady will not suffer you to be at a loss by it: "for all her domestics are clothed with double garments." —Prov. xxxi. 21. It is said that the servants of Mary are clothed with double garments, because they are enriched with both spiritual and temporal blessings. I once again recommend to you, when attending the devotions of the confraternity, not to abstain from confession and communion, which the rule prescribes; for if you attend the devotions in sin, and go out from them in sin, of what use shall the confraternity be to you? In the last place, I recommend to you to attend the meetings of the confraternity, solely with a view to the performance of the devotions it prescribes. Each one will take his own place, be obedient, perform whatever duty is assigned him, and have no other view in attending the exercises than the salvation of his own soul. Act thus, and you shall see how the Mother of God will protect you in matters both spiritual and temporal. And she will be a mother to you, more especially at the hour of death. O what a consolation on the death-bed, to have served Mary! Father Binetti relates,

(Perfez. di N. 5, cap. 31.) that being present at the death of a client of Mary, he, before dying, addressed to him these words, "O father, if you but knew how delighted I am at having served Mary—I could not make you conceive the joy which I feel upon this point ;" and thus he died in a heavenly peace. And I think that those brethren who belong to the confraternity of Mary, shall die a consoling death. The Duke of Papuli, who said that he attributed whatever graces he had received, to the circumstance of his having attended the meetings of the confraternity of Mary, when on the point of death, called his son to him, and said : " My son, attend the devotions of the confraternity of our Lady ; that is the greatest inheritance I can bequeath to you ; I leave it to you.

Let us all, my brethren, throw ourselves at the feet of our Lady, and promise her never to leave her congregation more. Let every one say with me, Ah, my Queen, and my Mother ! I should be now in hell if you had not preserved me from it. I thank you this morning, and ask pardon of you for having so often left your confraternity without cause. How many sins should I not have avoided by going thither ? Pardon me, O Mother ! and pray your Son to pardon all the offences which I have committed against him. Yes, my Jesus, by the blood which you have

shed for me, and by the love you bear to Mary, pardon me my sins, because I repent of them. But let us now make promise, and say, O Mother of God, I promise you never more to leave your confraternity without particular necessity ; I make this promise, punish me if I fail in it. And you, O Queen ! assist me in all my occasions, but especially when I am in danger of offending God. Call upon her then, my brethren, and she will most assuredly assist you. And at the hour of my death, O Mother, do not abandon me ; assist me then, and make me die under your mantle. Courage, my brethren, let us be faithful to the promises which we have made to Mary this morning. You come to honour her in this chapel, but she shall one day bring you to reign with her for ever in the kingdom of Paradise. And I shall now bless you on her part, that you may be able to keep the promises you have made her.

The same Acts as before. See page 13.

DISCOURSE

To Pious Maidens.

MY sisters, I do not intend to explain the privileges and blessings acquired by those maidens who consecrate their virginity to Jesus Christ ; I shall only glance at them. First, they become in the eyes of God as beautiful as the angels of heaven. Baronius relates, (Ann. 480, num. 23, in Compend.) that upon the death of a holy virgin, named Georgia, an immense multitude of doves was seen to fly around her ; and when the body was carried to the church, they ranged themselves along that part of the roof which corresponded to the situation of the corpse, and did not leave until she was buried. Those doves were thought to be angels who accompanied that virginal body.

Moreover, a maiden who leaves the world and dedicates herself to Jesus Christ, becomes his spouse. In the gospel our Redeemer is called Father, or Master, or Shepherd of our souls ; but, with regard to those virgins, he calls himself their spouse ; they “went out to meet the bridegroom.” When a young woman wishes to es-

tablish herself in the world, she will examine (if she be prudent,) which of all her suiters is the most noble, and the richest. Let us then learn from the spouse in the sacred canticles, who well knows—let us learn from her what manner of spouse is he whom consecrated virgins aspire to. Tell me, O sacred spouse, what manner of spouse is he who makes you the most fortunate of women. “My beloved is white,” she says, “and ruddy, chosen among thousands.”—Cant. v. 10. He is all white, by reason of his purity; and ruddy, by reason of the love with which he burns. He is in fine, so noble, and so kind as to be the most amiable of spouses.—With reason, then, did the glorious virgin, St. Agnes, (as we learn from St. Ambrose,) when it was proposed to her to marry the son of the Prefect of Rome, reply, that she had a much more advantageous match in view: “*Sponsum offertis meliorem reperi.*” Some ladies endeavouring to persuade St. Domitilla to marry Count Aurelian, nephew of the Emperor Domitian, saying there was no obstacle, as he was willing that she should remain a Christian, tell me, replied the saint, if a monarch and a clown both pretended to a maiden, which would she choose? Now I, should I marry with Aurelian, would have to leave the King of Heaven; it would be a folly—I will not do it. And thus, in order to remain faithful to

Jesus Christ, to whom she had already consecrated her virginity, she was willing to be burned alive, a death which her barbarous suitor caused her to suffer.—Ap. Croiset. exerc. del. ai. 12. di. maggio.

Those spouses of Jesus Christ who leave the world for his sake, become his beloved ; they are called the first fruits of the lamb : “ The first fruits to God and to the lamb.”—Apoc. iv. 4. Why the first fruits ? Because, says Cardinal Ugone, as the first fruits are more grateful than any other to man, so virgins are dearer to God than any others. The divine spouse feeds amongst the lilies : “ Who feeds amongst the lilies ?”—Cant. ii. 16. And what is meant by lilies, if not those devout maidens who consecrate their virginity to Jesus Christ ? The venerable Bede writes, that the song of the virgins, that is, the glory which they give to God by preserving untouched the lily of their purity, is far more pleasing to him than the song of all the other saints. Wherefore the Holy Ghost says, that there is nothing comparable to virginity : “ Non est digna ponderatio continentis animæ.” And hence, Cardinal Ugone remarks, that dispensations are often granted from other vows, but never from the vow of chastity ; and the reason is, because no other treasure can compensate for the loss of that. And it is, for the same reason, that

Theologians say, the Blessed Mother would have consented to forego the dignity of Mother of God, could it have been had only at the expence of her virginity.

Who on this earth can conceive the glory which God has prepared for his virgin spouses in Paradise? Theologians says, that virgins have in Heaven their own "aureola," or special crown of glory, which the other saints, who are not virgins, are refused. But let us come at oncè to the most important point in our discourse. This young woman will say, cannot I become holy in the married state? I do not wish to give you the reply in my own words; hear those of St. Paul, and you shall see the difference between the married woman and the virgin: "And the unmarried woman, and the virgin, thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy, both in body and in spirit; but she that is married, thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband."—1 Cor. vii. 34. And, the Apostle adds: "And I speak this for your profit, not for a snare, but for that which is decent, and which may give you power to attend upon the Lord without impediment."—Ibid. 35. In the first place, I say that married persons can be holy in the spirit, but not in the flesh; on the contrary, virgins who have consecrated their virginity to Jesus Christ, are holy both in soul

and body. "Sancto corpore et spiritu;" and mark those other words, "to attend upon the Lord without impediment." Oh, how many obstacles have not married women to encounter in serving the Lord? and the more noble they are, the greater the obstacles. A woman to become holy, must adopt the necessary means, which are, much mental prayer, constant use of the sacraments, and continual thought of God. But what time has a married woman for thinking upon God? "She that is married thinketh on the things of the world," says St. Paul. The married woman has to think of providing her family with food and raiment. She has to think of rearing her children, of pleasing her husband and her husband's relatives; whence, as the apostle says, her heart is divided between God and her husband, and children. Her husband must be attended to; the children cry and scream, and are continually asking for a thousand things. What time can she have to attend to mental prayer, who can scarce attend to all the business of the house? how can she pray amid so many distracting thoughts and disturbances? Scarcely can she go to church, to recollect herself, and communicate upon the Sunday. She may have the good desire, but it will be difficult for her to attend to the things of God as she ought. It is true, that in this want of opportunities, she may gain merit, by resig-

nation to the will of God, who requires of her in that state, chiefly patience and resignation ; but in the midst of so many distractions and annoyances, without prayer, without meditation, without frequenting the sacraments, it will be morally impossible for her to have that holy patience and resignation.

But, would to God, that married women had no other evil to contend with besides that of not always being able to attend to their sanctification as much as they should ; the greater evil is the danger to which they are continually exposed of losing the grace of God, by reason of the intercourse which they must continually have with the relations and friends of their husband, as well in their own houses, as in the houses of others. Unmarried women do not understand this, but married women and those who have to hear their confessions know it well. Let us, however, now have done with the unhappy life which is led by married women, the ill treatment they receive from their husband, the disobedience of children, the wants of the family, the annoyance of mothers-in-law and relatives, the throes of childbirth, always accompanied by danger of death, not to mention the afflictions of jealousy, and scruples of conscience, with regard to the rearing up of their children, all which breed a tempest under which poor married women have continually to

groan, and God grant that in this tempest they may not lose themselves, so as to meet with hell in the other world, after having suffered a hell in this. Such is the enviable lot of those maidens who chose the world! But what! such a maiden replies, are there no married women holy? Yes, I answer there are; but who are they? Such only as become holy through their sufferings, by suffering all from God without finding fault, and with continual patience. And how many married women are to be found in such a state of perfection. They are very rare; and if you find any, they are always in sorrow, that when they could have done so they did not consecrate themselves to Jesus Christ. Amongst all the devout married women I have known, I never knew one to be satisfied with her condition.

The greatest happiness then falls to the lot of those maidens, who consecrate themselves to Jesus Christ. Those have to encounter none of the dangers which married women must necessarily be placed in. They are not bound to earth, by love of children, or men, or dress, or gallantry, whilst married women are obliged to dress with pomp and ornaments, in order to appear with their equals, and please their husbands. A maiden who has given herself to Jesus Christ, requires only what dress will cover her; nay, she should give scandal if she were to wear any other, or make

use of any ornaments. Moreover, virgins have no anxiety about house or children or relatives ; their whole care is centred in pleasing Jesus Christ, to whom they have consecrated their soul, their body, and all their love ; whence it is that they have more time, and a mind more disengaged, for frequent prayer and communion.

But let us now come to the excuses sometimes brought forward, by those who are cold in the love of Jesus Christ. Such an one will say, I should leave the world if I had some convent to go to, or at least, if I could always spend my time in devotion at the church when I should please ; but I could not remain at home, where I have bad brothers who ill treat me, and on the other hand, my parents are unwilling to have me frequent the church. But, I ask you, is it in order to save yourself, or lead an easy life you leave the world ? Is it to do your own will, or the will of Jesus Christ ? If you wish to become holy and serve Jesus Christ, I ask you another question ; in what does holiness consist ? Holiness does not consist in living in a convent, or spending the entire day in the church, but in being at confession and communion as often as you can, in obedience, in doing anything assigned you at home, in being retired, in bearing labour and contempt. And if you were to be in a convent how should you be employed ? Do you

imagine you should always be either in church or in your cell, or in the refectory, or at recreation? In the convent, although the sisters have a time marked out for prayer, for mass, and for communion, they have also their hours appointed for the business of the house, and more especially the lay sisters, who as they do not attend in the choir, have nearly all the labour of the house, and consequently least time for prayer. All exclaim, let us be in a convent, let us have a convent. How much more easy is it not for devout girls to become holy in their own houses than in a convent? How many such have I known to regret their having entered the convent, especially when the community was large? the poor lay sister in certain offices, having scarce time to say the rosary. But father, such a girl will answer, I have at home a peevish father and mother, I have bad brothers, all of them use me ill, I cannot stand it. Well I say, and if you marry, shall you not have to deal with mothers and sisters-in-law, and perhaps undutiful children, and perhaps a harsh husband? O how many cruel husbands are there not, who when first married promised great things, but shortly afterwards cease to be husbands, and became the tyrants of their wives, treating them not as companions but as slaves? Enquire of many married women whether this be not the fact. But, with-

out going beyond your own home, you all know how your mothers fared. One thing, at least, is certain, that all you should have to suffer at home, after having given yourself to God, you should suffer for the love of Jesus Christ, and he should make your cross sweet and light to you. But how dreadful is it not to suffer for the world's sake? to suffer without merit? Courage then! if Jesus Christ has called you to his love, and wishes to have you for his spouse, go on joyfully, it will be his care to afford you consolation even in the midst of sufferings.

This, of course, will be only in case you truly love him, and live as his spouse. Hear, then, for the last time, the means you are to adopt, in order to become holy, and live a true spouse of Jesus Christ; and these are, to practise the virtues becoming his spouse. It is read in the gospel that the kingdom of Heaven is likened unto virgins. But to what virgins? Not to the foolish, but to the wise. The wise were admitted to the nuptials, but the door was shut in the face of the foolish; to whom the spouse said, I know you not—you are indeed virgins, but I do not acknowledge you for my spouses. The true spouses of Jesus Christ follow the spouse whithersoever he goeth. "These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." What is the meaning of following the Lamb? St. Austin explains it, of imitating

him, both in body and mind. After you shall have consecrated your body to him, you must consecrate to him your whole heart, so that your heart may be entirely devoted to his love ; and, therefore, you must adopt all the means which are necessary for making you belong entirely to Jesus Christ.

The first of those means is mental prayer, to which you must be most attentive. But do not imagine that in order to pray thus, it is necessary for you to be in a convent, or remain all day in the church. It is true, that at home there is much disturbance created by the persons there ; nevertheless, those who wish can find time and place for prayer, this is in the morning before the others rise, and at night after the others shall have gone to bed. Neither, to pray, is it necessary to be always on bended knees ; you can pray whilst labouring, and even when walking upon business (should you have no other opportunity,) by raising your soul to God, and thinking on the passion of Jesus Christ, or any other pious subject.

The second means is, the frequentation of the sacraments of confession, and communion. With regard to confession, each one has to make choice of a confessor, whom she is to obey in everything, otherwise she will never walk steadily in the way of perfection. As to communion, she must not

depend solely upon obedience ; she must desire it, and ask for it. This divine food must be hungered after ; Jesus Christ must be desired. It is frequent communion that renders his spouses faithful to Jesus Christ, especially in the preservation of holy purity. The most holy sacrament preserves the soul in every virtue ; and it appears that its most special effect is to preserve untouched the chastity of virgins, according to that of the prophet, who calls this sacrament, “ the corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins.”—Zach. ix. 17.

The third means is, retirement and caution : “ As the lily amongst the thorns, so is my beloved amongst the daughters.”—Cant. ii. 2. For a virgin to think of remaining faithful to Jesus Christ amid the conversations, the jests, and other amusements of the world, is useless ; it is necessary that she preserve herself amid the thorns of abstinence and mortification, by using not only the greatest modesty and reserve in speaking with men, but even all austerity and penitential exercises, when necessary. Such are the thorns which preserve the lilies, I mean young maidens, who otherwise should soon be lost. The Lord calls the cheeks of his spouse as beautiful as those of the turtle : “ Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove’s.”—Cant. i. 9. And why so ? Because the turtle, by instinct, avoids the company

of other birds, and always remains alone. That virgin, then, shall appear beautiful in the eyes of Jesus Christ, who shall do all that she can to hide herself from the eyes of others. St. Jerome says, that Jesus is a jealous spouse: "*Zelotypus est Jesus.*" Hence he is much displeased when he sees a virgin dedicated to him, endeavouring to appear before, and please men. Pious maidens endeavour to appear repulsive, that they may not attract men. The venerable sister Catherine of Jesus, afterwards a Teresian nun, washed her face with the filthy water of tar, and then designedly exposed her face to the sun, that she might lose her complexion. St. Andregesina, having, as we are told by Bollandus, been promised in marriage, prayed the Lord to deform her, and was heard, for she immediately was covered with a leprosy, which caused every one to fly her; and as soon as her suitor had ceased his offers, her former beauty was restored. It is related by James di Viatrico, (*In spec. exemp. 20. v. Virg.*) that there was a certain virgin in a convent, whose eyes had inflamed a prince, who threatened to set fire to the monastery if she would not yield to him; but she plucked out her eyes and sent them to him in a basin, the bearer of which was instructed to say, "here are the darts which have wounded your heart—take them, and leave me my soul untouched." The

same author (Exemp. 19.) tells of St. Euphemia, that having been promised by her father to a certain count, who left no means untried to obtain her ; she, in order to free herself from his addresses, cut off her nose and lips, saying to herself, " vain beauty, you shall never be to me an occasion of sin !" St. Antoninus tells something similar (and his account is confirmed by Baronius,) of the Abbess Ebba, who fearing an invasion of the barbarians, cut off her nose and upper lip to the teeth ; and that all the other nuns, to the number of thirty, following her example, did the same. The barbarians came, and seeing them so deformed, set fire to the monastery through rage, and burned them alive ; and hence the Church, as Baronius tells us, has enrolled them amongst her martyrs. This is not allowable for others to do ; those saints did it by the especial impulse of the Holy Ghost. But it sufficiently well answers the purpose of shewing you what virgins who loved Jesus Christ have done, to prevent their being sought by men. Devout virgins at present should at least move as modestly, and be seen as little as possible by men. Should it happen that a virgin should, by chance, and without any fault of hers, receive by violence any insult from men, be it known to you, that after it she will remain as pure as before. St. Lucia made an answer of this kind

to the tyrant who threatened to dishonour her : " If you do," she said, " and I be so treated against my will, my crown shall be double." It is the consent only that is hurtful ; and know, moreover, that if a virgin be modest and reserved, men will have no inclination to interfere with her.

The fourth means of preserving purity, is the mortification of the senses. St. Basil says, " a virgin should not be immodest in any respect, in tongue, ears, eyes, touch, and still less in mind." —S. Bas. de vir. Virg. A virgin, in order to keep herself pure, must be modest in her speech, conversing seldom with men, and that only through necessity, and in few words. Her ears must be pure, by not listening to worldly conversations. Her eyes must be pure, by being either closed, or fixed upon the earth in the presence of men. She must be pure in touch, using therein all possible caution, both as regards herself and others. She must be pure in spirit, by resisting all immodest thoughts, through the help of Jesus and Mary. And to this end, she must mortify herself with fasting, abstinence, and other penitential exercises ; which things she must not practice without the consent of her confessor, otherwise they should injure her soul by making her proud. Those acts of penance must not be made without the confessor's permission, but

they must be desired and sought for ; for the confessor, if he do not see the penitent wishing for them, will not give them. Jesus is a spouse of blood, who espoused our souls upon the cross, whereon he shed all his blood for us. "A bloody spouse art thou to me."—Exod. iv. 25. Therefore those spouses who love him, love tribulation, infirmity, sorrows, ill-treatment and injuries ; and receive them not only with patience, but with joy. Thus may we understand that passage which says that, "Virgins follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." They follow their spouse Jesus, with joy and gladness whithersoever he goeth, even through sorrow and disgrace, as has been done by so many holy virgins, who have followed him to torments and to death, smiling and rejoicing.

Finally, sisters, in order that you may obtain perseverance in this holy life, you must recommend yourselves often and much to most holy Mary, the Queen of Virgins. She is the mediatrix who negotiates those espousals, and brings virgins to espouse her Son. "After her shall virgins be brought to the King."—Ps. xlv. 15. It is she, in fine, who obtains fidelity for those chosen spouses ; for, without her assistance, they should be all unfaithful.

Come on, then, you who intend to live no longer for the world, but for Jesus Christ alone. (I address myself to those who feel themselves

called by that divine spouse to consecrate themselves to his love.) I do not wish that you should make any vow this morning, or oblige yourselves at once to perpetual chastity. You shall do that when God shall inspire you, and your confessor shall be willing. I only desire you by a simple act, and without any obligation, to thank Jesus Christ for having called you to his love ; and to offer yourselves to him henceforward for your entire lives. Say then to him, ah, my Jesus ! my God, and my Redeemer ! who have died for me, compassionate me who burn to call myself your spouse. I burn, because I see that you have called me to that honour ; nor do I know how to thank you for that grace. I should now have been in hell ; and you, instead of chastising me, have called me to be your spouse. Yes, my spouse, I leave the world, I leave all through love of you, and give myself entirely to you. What world ?—what world do I speak of ? My Jesus, henceforward you are to be my only good—my only love. I see that you wish to have my entire heart, and I wish to resign it entirely to you. Receive me in your mercy, and do not reject me as I have deserved you should. Forget all the offences that I have given you, of which I repent with my whole soul ; would that I had died before offending you. Pardon me—inflame me with your holy love—and give me your aid,

in order that I may be faithful to you, and never leave you more. You, my spouse, have given yourself all to me. Behold ! I give myself entirely to you. Mary, my Queen and my Mother, chain my heart to that of Jesus Christ ; and fasten both hearts so that they be never sundered more.

I leave you now my blessing, in order that you may be so bound to Jesus Christ, as never again to depart from him. Give your hearts now to Jesus Christ ; say, Jesus, my spouse, henceforward I wish to love you alone, and nothing else.

THE END.

Princeton University Library



32101 063846545

